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LITTLE LADY LORRAINE





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# LITTLE LADY LORRAINE.

A Novel.

BY COURTENEY GRANT.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1873.

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251. b. 122.



# LITTLE LADY LORRAINE.

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## CHAPTER I.

ADY LORRAINE sat in a corner of the ball-room, absently fanning herself. By her side reposed a fat, asthmatic old chaperon. In reality they had nothing whatever to do with each other, but Lady Lorraine had scraped up a sort of ball-room acquaintance with her for propriety's sake, and because she was weary and wanted to be allowed to sit quiet. Lord Clieveden was occupied with somebody at supper ; her cousin, Lady Mary,

was busy dancing; and Lady Lorraine hailed a few moments' rest with satisfaction.

Lady Lorraine! what a pretty name! Lady Lorraine Tremeneere! it was her mother's fancy. Lorraine had been the name echoing through the old halls at home, clinging to the ivied towers, being shouted with childish glee among the battlements, and heard all day about the gardens and terraces of that same dear old home in years gone by. Lorraine had been the sunny child scampering wildly to and fro, filling the air with laughter, and hearts with gladness, scattering smiles broadcast, and snatching kisses unawares.

"My dear! my dear!" said the fat, asthmatic old chaperon, tapping Lorraine's arm with her fan.

Lady Lorraine lifted her eyes from the point of her white satin shoe, where they

had been fixed, and woke up from her reverie—woke up to find two young men standing in front of her, waiting for “the pleasure of a dance.”

“I beg your pardon,” said she, smiling. “I was asleep, I think! Don’t you see I am not dancing? I have hurt my foot, and am only waiting for my cousin.”

The young men bowed, and, expressing condolence, withdrew. Others followed suit, with a like result: Lorraine would not dance. The asthmatic old chaperon became annoyed at last. Was this her idea of a girl doing her duty? was it fair? was it right? nay! even if her foot had been irremediably damaged, still—ought she not to dance? What—refused Lord Burleigh, too!

“My dear, my dear,” said she, heaving a reproachful sigh, “have you hurt yourself much?”

"Twisted my foot somehow!" said Lady Lorraine, colouring crimson.

"What an odd girl!" said the old lady to herself, wishing her girl had as many chances as that : trust her for not being allowed to throw them away !

Lorraine, with your big soft eyes straining out there to the flowers, fixed dreamily on them and not seeing one of them, where have your thoughts flown to-night ? Why that set unvarying expression on your face ? Lorraine, proud, pretty Lorraine, what is it ?

Lady Lorraine was annoyed with herself ; unjustly ! No prouder girl in London than Lorraine Tremeneere ; hearts and coronets had been prostrated before her, praying for her acceptance, praying for her smiles and favour, praying for hope and encouragement at least : but all in vain ! She would smile, indeed, but vaguely ; if

devotion became tiresome, then coldness, frigidity, and a freezing demeanour, though kind all the time, distanced by degrees the devotee, and he saw it was no good. Acquaintances, friends by the dozens she had, but never had the proud little head bowed in submission yet, and never had her heart acknowledged by word or sign that she was vanquished and must surrender at discretion. Far back in the dim vista of her teens, leaving traces even on her first season, there had been something—a first ideal Love—but that had come to nothing, as first ideal Loves generally do, and though there was still a soft place there in her heart, bringing a blush to her cheek, and a half smile to her eyes at the remembrance, the smile was more one of pity for herself than any vestige of affection or regret influencing her. Then (here is her life's story straight off), when still at this stage,

she had come across the great friend of this ideal first Love, and treading on the ashes of the old affection, making something of a go-between between him and her, confiding in him her little miseries, to her then seeming so great, a friendship had grown and grown between them, so filling up their lives, so surpassing their dreams and aspirations, that it had at length to be noticed ; and they came to terms. Lady Lorraine, strong and proud and self-confident as ever, dictated them. These were her words :

“We will be friends always, or till you tire of me. I shall not tire of you ever, because it is not in my nature. When you marry of course it must be different, and I shall count on you no longer. Till then I shall trust you always, and tell you everything. And you must tell me everything or what

you like. And you must come and see me at Ravenshill" (her home), "will you not? And you will be my Friend" (with a big F) "always, will you not? And I shall write to you, sometimes three times a year, and sometimes three times a month. And you must never, never, mistrust me, or think that I am forgetting you. And also you must never misunderstand me, or think I mean anything but Friendship. I shall be the same always. I don't think I shall ever marry. I shall never care for any one again, and you know all about that.

"Always your friend,

"LORRAINE."

Walter Carew was the name of the young man. Lorraine's confidence was not misplaced—he was as good a young fellow as ever breathed.

And very much on these terms had

their friendship lasted. It had become an understood thing at Ravenshill—nay! in Society—and it was Society's marvel. Only for their very great trust in each other, and for his very great respect for her, perhaps it would not have lasted. He kissed her once—she was reading; he had stooped over her, and something had impelled him to try it once. She just rose, with her book half closed, while every trace of colour left her cheek.

"You will not do that again, Walter?" she asked, looking at him steadily. "Promise!"

"No," stammered he.

Then she sat down again, and talked away unconcernedly as though nothing had happened.

More than this had the friendship outlived: jealousies, differences of opinion, seeming forgetfulness, seeming affronts, all

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had it stood unshaken. Disputes there had been, but one or the other, or sometimes both, had begged forgiveness, and an increased tenderness of tone—as much as they ever dreamed of using to each other—had been the only landmark by which to know the fact.

Smoothly thus had the time glided by.

But now misfortune has fallen on their friendship, and Lorraine's heart is very sad.

Walter Carew was the eldest son of Lord Pauncefort. He had always been brought up on his expectations, had followed his father's lead on the turf, and had not despised play, though his heart was not much in them. In the Guards, he numbered amongst his friends the best men in his regiment, and was by all pronounced to be a good fellow. Sorrow and grief had, however, befallen the house of Pauncefort. Bad luck, a long run of bad luck had

so impoverished his lordship, that at last he could disguise the fact no longer, and was forced to confess the state of things to his son. Look at it in whatever light they might, stave off the evil as they might, still truth will out.

On the other hand, Walter himself was not entirely free from difficulties, and though he might conceal the fact from his father, it made the blow no lighter, and made him struggle more vehemently than ever to repair the mischief. Money was not to be had, credit will not last for ever, and the Household troops and bankruptcy do not go well together.

To send in his papers was with him but comparatively a work of small moment; grieved as he might be to quit his regiment, he loved it too well to bring on it the smallest shadow of discredit.

To Lorraine he came with his tale; one

of the hardest for a girl to hear, for in such cases she is so hopelessly useless. All the hand-wringing and sobbing in the world will not bring help or make money. But still she believed the evil day would be tided over, and that things would get straight yet. Women always do, about things they cannot understand.

But now to-day—the day of this ball—something else had come to her knowledge.

“I am going to leave England, dear Lorraine,” he had written. “An appointment, if I can get it, or else a line regiment, or else I don’t know what. When shall I see you?”

And Lorraine is very sad.

In the boudoir in Grosvenor Square, something thus had her thoughts run, and now they were ten times stronger:—

“Leave me all alone? What is he

doing? I cannot stand it. For years I have told him everything—every single thing! I would rather cut off my right hand—*much*. Why! life looks impossible without him! so blank, so dreary! It would not *be* life! It cannot, cannot be!”

And then she cried, poor pretty Lorraine! and then she wondered at herself. Then she vowed to work for him, or to beg for him; but then she knew she must not talk of it to any one—and as for her father, no! he was kindness itself—but then he was common sense itself. And then—“They will think I am in love with him, and I’m not that!”

So, with her head full of him, and of plans to help him, she followed her cousin Lady Mary Dalton upstairs to the ball, and seemed as gay and as happy as usual.

Only about the middle of the evening,

she did long to rest, and never had the young men at her London balls seemed to her such an inane, tiresome, all cut-on-the-same-pattern set of young men as did those clustering round her to-night.

Lady Mary was dancing. Oh, yes! trust her; not one was she to feel or show disgust at any inanity so long as there was anything to be got by attention and civility. She was not pretty, and she had not a penny; but she had a figure and dressed showily, and she hoped by unremitting care, and vigilance, and civility to customers to suit somebody. Just now, as she whirls by with Lord Burleigh, her laugh grates harshly on Lorraine's ear.

"Lady Lorraine is not dancing to-night," were some words which reached Lorraine from the cluster of young men in the doorway; and looking up, she saw Walter

Carew, who had just arrived, edging his way through them.

He coloured at the inucndo, and that she should have heard it—and she blushed as she bowed to him.

In a few moments he came over to her, and asked her to dance.

“No, I must be consistent, but I will go to supper.”

“Oh, then! my dear, your foot is better,” said the fat asthmatic old lady, maliciously.

“No, it isn’t!” answered Lorraine.

“So you are going to dance, Lady Lorraine, after all!” said one of the young men.

“No! I am not. I cannot, Lord Twistleton; but Mr. Carew is going to give me some supper, which no one else was civil enough to offer me.”

Lady Lorraine could take care of herself.

“I don’t care! I call it vulgar,” was say-

ing a fat old lady, one of the many impeding their progress on the stairs, "to care only for swells, and great names, and great people, and money, and splash and dash—ah! my dear Lady Lorraine, I beg your pardon, I hope I have not torn your gown, dear."

"Such a presumptuous, ragged, arrogant speech, I wonder they sat it out."

"They say so, they really say so—an arranged thing! I wonder Lord Cliveden allows it; but she has no mother, poor dear, and although Lady Mary" ——

Lorraine turned vindictively to see who it was, and as she did so, her eyes and Walter Carew's met. He turned it off with a laugh and hurried her on.

"Ah! Lady Lorraine! you up? Since how long? I did not know you were in town! I hope I see you well."

"Ah! Lady Lorraine! might I introduce

my brother ? he is so anxious—ah ! well,—another time.”

“An ice, please,” Lorraine said, as Carew found her a seat.

The hum went on.

“Hideous, is she not ? but a clever actress ! Really, there is no one to see now ! and nothing being acted worth going to. Quite melancholy. What are we coming to ?”

“Good ball this !”

“Yes, charming !”

“Do you know who that is ?”

“No.”

“Then I’ll tell you.”

And a whispered conversation followed, during which Walter Carew re-appeared with the ice.

“You got my note ?”

“Yes, is it really true ? I cannot believe it. You will not really go ?”

"Yes."

"But what can you do out there, what will you do?"

"I don't know!" and he looked miserable enough.

"I wish I could help you. I wish I could do anything."

He smiled a trustful smile into her face, as though he knew that well enough.

"Are you sorry to go, to leave all this?" and she made a motion towards the people and the surrounding scene, as she looked up in his face anxiously.

"No," said he. "As for society and all that, I hate it! There is no regret for that, but for other reasons," and she saw the tears gathering in his eyes, as they dwelt on her face.

"I cannot talk to you here, surrounded thus; I cannot say what I think or feel; I am afraid to talk at all about it. I——"

"You are so cold, Lorraine," began he, "I should almost have thought you could have talked about anything anywhere."

"Cold, am I?" said she, and a look came over her face, that caused him to repent of his words, and taught him perhaps more of her heart than he had seen during all the time he had known her.

"Who is that?" she asked hastily, as a young man lounged into the room by himself. "Why! it is! surely! Charlie Dalrymple! You never told me he was in London. How altered and brown he is! Will he know us? I am glad Mary is upstairs."

It was Lorraine's first love. He had been absent from England some two or three years. Some mischief-making had prevented that early attachment from coming to anything. Lady Mary had taken

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alarm lest her cousin Lorraine should make a very brilliant match, had herself tried to hook the fish, and in the effort had lost the prey for both.

"What will you do, Lorraine?" asked Carew. "Will you meet him? I had not the faintest notion that he was anywhere nearer than the north of Italy."

"Being so cold, and so well able to talk of anything anywhere," said Lady Lorraine, "I will stand my ground, and await his movements. No," she added hastily, seeing a pained expression cross the young man's face, "I am not angry! but your going away has so put me out, I am not myself. Come and see me, and let us talk over everything quietly."

"Quietly!" said he, impetuously. "If I were on my way to the hands of the hangman, I believe you would say, 'Let us talk it over quietly.'"

"Perhaps I should," answered she, coquettishly.

How pretty she looked at that moment!

Charlie Dalrymple saw her, coloured, started, wondered, thought a minute, then seeing Carew beside her, finally plucked up courage and made a move towards her. How awkwardly he did it! and how queen-like and self-possessed, and charming and gracious she seemed as she put out her hand to him! A woman's pride must be ten times greater than a man's since it arms her to the teeth full fifty times more completely on half a second's notice.

"You find two of your old friends together, Mr. Dalrymple. What an unexpected pleasure for us both! We thought you were in Italy."

"Lady Lorraine, you really have not forgotten me then? And Carew, old fellow! how fares it with you?"

"The world has been kind to all of us," said Lorraine, "I think, since we parted, to judge by your looks and our experience. But tell me something of yourself—where you have been—why you have not come back before, and why you are here now?"

And as he told her, Lorraine watched him, looking for old familiar gestures; listened to his voice, seeking old tones, long lost and almost forgotten, and found herself wondering at that dream she had dreamed so well.

Then Lady Mary came up, followed by Lord Clieveden.

"Are you ready to go, Lorraine? Why—well! This is a meeting!"

Lorraine whispered to Carew to get the cloaks, and felt sick with the old angry feeling of half disgust and half jealousy, as she listened to Lady Mary Dalton's noisy talk.

"Who is going to take you to the carriage, Lorraine?" asked her cousin, when they had put on their wraps.

"As Mr. Carew is now hooked round the button by my tiresome fringe, I think we had better come together," said Lorraine; "besides, I must not monopolise Mr. Dalrymple entirely."

"What were you thinking about, Lorraine, just now?" asked Carew as they went.

"I was wondering how ever I could have cared one straw about him. Come and see me soon."


"Yes."

"Come and see us soon, Dalrymple," called Lord Clieveden, as the carriage-door shut.

"Yes."

And the two friends stood on the steps together.

## CHAPTER II.

“ELL!” thought the postman, as he turned a small missive round and round between his fingers while he waited for the door to be opened, “I don’t know that I ever left one of this sort here before. A queer little thing, to be sure, with a gold monogram, and folded so quaint—no envelope, neither! Letter and all in one! I wonder how they does it! I should write the inside out, I ’spect, and double it wrong then. Why don’t they come? Ring and knock again! Why don’t he have a slit in his door?”

It's a sin when people don't, and a good fitting door, too, that it won't go under! At last! at last!" he added, sarcastically, as a man-servant opened the door. "You have taken your time and consideration about it."

And he departed on his mission down the street.

If the tiny note had caused a moment's thought to the postman, it was almost a clap of thunder to the old servant.

"Some mistake! some mistake!" mumbled he; "my master never has this kind of thing, and he turned it over contemptuously, as he fumbled in his many pockets for his glasses.

"A coronite, too, all in gold! No, it isn't a coronite! What a queer thing! and what for? For show, or to show who it's from, as if that weren't writ inside!

But I'll be blowed if it isn't all right. 'Christopher Vernon, Esq., King Street, St. James's.' Yes, that's him ! Some gaudy, fashionable thing worriting my master ! Well," and heaving a deep sigh, he shut the street-door, and turned up-stairs with the letter.

A comfortable room enough, Mr. Vernon's. Why should he not have letters of this sort ? To judge by the apartment, he seemed no hermit, no anchorite, no hater of his kind, or of social joys. The room is almost luxuriously furnished, with its sofas, two arm-chairs, first-rate prints on the walls, handsome curtains, handsome tables, with valuable writing paraphernalia, some precious ivories on pedestals in the corners, another table covered with beautiful books, a miniature case, and in the corner by the fire-place all the requisites for a comfortable " smoke," which glue many visitors to

the spot, and prevent their proceeding farther on their tour of inspection round the rooms.

“Ah! well, I will not plague him with it now,” groaned Hawkins, and discreetly placing the note on the table, the thoughtful servant withdrew.

Let us look at the weary man within, thus guarded and considered so carefully by postman and servant.

Lift the portière with its gaudy stripes, push aside the lace edging, and open that inner door. Heavens! what a contrast! Not in the man, there is nothing to shock us there, but in the presiding genius of the two rooms.

A dirty soiled paper on the walls, no curtain to the window. “I like to look out on the day and on the night,” he said once in extenuation. No carpet on the floor, only a strip here and there, a huge book-

case full of a wondrous miscellany of books of all sorts, sizes, and shapes ; an enormous deal table covered with papers, blotting paper, ink blots, inkstand, and pens ; a wooden arm-chair drawn up by the fire-place, and a wooden stool, on which sits Christopher Vernon, Esq., absently looking out of the window, his elbows on the table, and his hands clasped under his chin.

His room, his eccentricity, might probably prejudice a visitor against him, but it would be a false prejudice. He is worthy of favour. A second glance would give a better impression. He is not good-looking — not, that is, what would be called a handsome man. He would never shine in a ball-room, as owning a pleasant, youthful, good-humoured face ; he would never do as a dandy ; neither does he look a great man ! Yet there is a line of

determination on that face, a look of aspiration on that brow—nay, more ! you catch a glimpse of soul and of inspiration in that eye that fascinates and conquers, if the heart be not steeled too obstinately against it, and if the power written there be recognised and allowed its sway. There is a look of pride, of haughtiness about that lip, the finely-chiselled nose has caught it, and the whole face ; but he is restless now, it is no fitting time to take his portrait. As he moves, his character seems to change ; as he tumbles his three-legged stool over in getting up hastily, he seems more of a man, less of a hero than just now, quiescent,—when power was dormant, or only expressed by his changing countenance, when hope and determination alternately flushed his cheek, and gave depth and decision to his glance.

Standing there, he looks every inch a

man ; not quite so much the gentleman as when aspirations filled his mind, and took it far on high.

“ I am unfit for work to-day, I am no good at all ; I am taking a holiday without meaning to give myself one,” and he walked aimlessly into the next room.

“ Why, how long has this been here ?” and he seized the note feverishly. “ From her ! I thought she had forgotten me. At last ! at last ! But when ?—how, I wonder ? The Post, practical, commonplace, matter-of-fact mode of delivery,” he added, with a dreary smile ; “ I should do to put in my own play ! That old fool Hawkins, why did he not give it me ? It may want an answer. It may have been here all day,” and he rang the bell furiously, while he still contemplated his treasure.

“ Hawkins,” he said, with an assumption

of calm in his tone, "how many times have I told you to give me my letters at once?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, how long has this been here? Just to save yourself the trouble of going a few steps farther, you leave here a most important letter."

"What, that 'ere quaint three-cornered thing? You don't call that an important letter? Letters, and documents, and manuscripts I knows, but that—why, that's"—(with a contempt past language or imitation)—"only a worriting tale from some fashionable female that wants something. Any one can see that with half an eye."

"Hawkins, you are a fool and a drivelling idiot! You know nothing about it, and I am surprised at you. Not know letters when you see them! Bills you know, but letters! Well! it is true, my fashion-

able correspondence is small, so perhaps your ignorance is my fault. But how long has this been here?"

"Not long, sir," said Hawkins, soothingly; "some time—some little time ago."

"You are a fool, Hawkins!"

"Why!" said the old man, adjusting his spectacles. "Lor'! if master ain't put out! The first time I've seed him so all these blessed years."

And Hawkins stood contemplating him with a mixture of awe and admiration.

"Perhaps you are right, Hawkins; perhaps I am put out. I wanted this letter; and another time never mind disturbing me, but let me have anything at once."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir," took up Hawkins, mollified immediately; "but I never thought you would want such a thing as that; and then I knew you was a-writing, and busy and working that head

of yours," and Hawkins signed reverently to his master's mighty cranium ; "and I thought if I could save you a little bit of worriting—postpone it, like—I would."

"Thank you, Hawkins. I *was* working ; but — but this letter would have helped me."

"Helped him ! hear that—helped him !"

"You may go, Hawkins."

And Hawkins went.

But as he went, the bell—the door-bell—his door-bell—that eternal test to servants' tempers, and an article which will probably be honourably mentioned in many a future strike—rang again, and as he stood with the door open in his hand, and saw a lady in a brougham seeking admittance, was it to be wondered at if he articulated with some heat,—

"Another on 'em !"

But as she alighted, and he saw before

him Mrs. Vernon, his young master's mother, he quickly changed his tone, and wreathed his sickliest smile for her acceptance, as he prostrated himself in an old-fashioned obeisance before her.

"My son is at home, I suppose? You need not announce me. I want to surprise him."

She was a woman of majestic figure and extraordinary beauty. Large dark liquid eyes, rippling wavy auburn hair, delicately chiselled features, and exquisitely small hands and feet.

She went upstairs by herself, opened the door softly, and stood for a moment contemplating her son, who was standing leaning against the mantelpiece reading his letter.

Her heart was in her face, and she stood looking on. Then, disappointed at his not seeing her at once, for his back was

turned to the door, she glided in softly, and putting her hand on his shoulder, whispered,—

“Christopher, my darling!”

“Mother!” exclaimed he, starting violently.

The letter fell on the floor, and she was clasped in his arms.

“How is this, mother? left Nismes? in London? and never told me! I would have come to meet you—to fetch you.”

“I came on business—that money, you know! They wanted me at once. I could not delay—and, besides, I liked surprising you. I might have telegraphed, but I didn’t. And how is my boy? What were you doing, dear, when I came up? You were so absorbed in your letter you never heard me. Ah! what is that I see?” and she slightly turned the fallen letter

with the point of her tiny boot : " L. T., Lorraine Tremeneheere. I thought that was all over ?"

" So it is, mother."

" Hein ? it seems like it."

" Lady Lorraine has certainly written to me to-day, but it is the first time for months, and only for a charity."

" Does she want you to help her charities ? to help her benevolence—that she cannot afford—with your earnings ?

*Mais c'est un peu*"——

" You mistake, mother. It is something about—in fact, her secret, not mine, mother, so you must not press me. She has a poor little friend, some little woman whom she is very fond of, whom she wants to help. She was ever noble and kind, and unselfish, you know ; and she and I will ever be friends, I hope, till we die."

He spoke with determination, and his mother's womanly tact warned her not to press the subject too far.

"Friendships differ, ' and kindnesses differ, and unselfishness differs," soliloquised she half to herself.

Christopher understood her, and looked as though he were going to say something. But he didn't. He only picked up the letter, rang the bell for Hawkins, and gave the order,

"Bring some tea."

We can leave the careful Hawkins to his preparations ; we can leave the son dutifully sitting at his mother's feet ; we can leave her stroking her boy's hair, and looking fondly in his much-loved face, while we ourselves look back some few years, and unravel this mother's and son's histories ; look back on some of the joys and griefs of the weary past ; look back and understand

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their relative positions—the cares they have known, the tears they have shed, the joys they have tasted, and the aims they have cherished.

### CHAPTER III.



YEARS ago, before this generation sprang up, Carlingsford, the home of the Dalrymples, was a gay house. We are talking of the time when the present lord had been in possession of the title and estates about a year, had married, and had brought his lovely bride home to rejoice the hearts of the country-side, and win golden opinions in the neighbourhood. A happy couple they were — possessing beauty, wealth, and mutual affection. Fortune smiled on them, indeed! Was it wonderful if visitors

flocked, week by week, to Carlingsford? and was it wonderful if the geniality, hospitality, and deserved popularity of Lord and Lady Chester, made absence from Carlingsford the greatest penance they could possibly inflict on their friends? Brothers and sisters they both had—they kept the house gay. Even if Lord Chester did pretend he had some question to study or “get up” for the House, and even if Lady Chester had not her head full of some ball, concert, or “play-acting” for the evening hours, something was sure to be going on. What expeditions they had! what merry days out hunting! what drives! what rides and walks! and how pleasant every one was! and what nice people one always met at Carlingsford! Always some one worth meeting to content everybody. What well-selected parties! and just the right number!

Two of Lady Chester's sisters, Jane and Maude, almost lived at Carlingsford. They were such happy, bright beings, Lord Chester said he could not do without them, and content were they to be there. Ever busy, ever full of some scheme for somebody's happiness, they were sunbeams in the house. Now it was some plan to amuse the guests, now some scheme for the good of the parish, now something to amuse the villagers, and now some simple effort to allay some poor sufferer's agony—no wonder they were beloved by all who knew them !

In one of the lodges to the park, there lived a family who had won the esteem and affection of Lady Chester and her sisters. Dasent their name ; simple, honest people they were, as ever lived. Often they stopped, as they went through the gate to the village, to speak to the old woman, or

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even merely to see the garden, and take in the pretty peaceful scene. The lodge itself was so picturesque and quaint—situated at the foot of a hill—all gables and queer corners, and *such* a porch! with creepers twining all over it, racing each other up the chimneys, meeting laughingly over the windows, and hanging down mockingly over the door, like children stretching out their arms with peals of mischievous laughter, when they have got somewhere high up where they ought not to be, but know they cannot be reached by “nurse,” and are safe. And behind it (a glorious background) rose noble old trees, arching their boughs, in honest pride, and looking down with a sort of condescending affection on the little house as though it were their child, and it was their pleasure to shelter it and its inmates, and save them from wind and storm. And then all round grew the

flowers, bright and luxuriant and gaudy. They were like jewels in the emerald grass, which grew so trim and so bright ; as Mrs. Dasent used, with a proud blush and a toss of her head, to say—

“ Miss Janie says there’s no other grass like it nowhere.”

And among it all the great yellow carriage-road, winding up the hill—winding up, the girls used to say, to grandeur, and pomposity, and to “ the world.” And yet, it was a dear old world, to them, as they took it.

The Dasents had a child—a daughter—Annie her name. A lovely girl she was, or would have been, if she had been in society, and dressed in society’s plumes. In her own sometimes, too, she was lovely, and again sometimes when her fingers were brown with mould, and her hair very much in want of brushing, and

parted all askew, and her dress, undone where it should have been fastened, and fastened where it would not have mattered so much—then she was not so lovely. She was a clever and a curious girl.

“I must make a lady of her,” Maude used to say. Maude had quite lost her heart to her, used to read with her, used to have her to wait upon her, used to talk to her, and used to marvel at her.

Was not Annie Dasent spoilt by all this? No; in one way she was spoilt. She learnt to think, to aspire, to long to know, and to long to do. This was spoiling Annie Dasent for washing, and boiling, and opening the gate, and even perhaps for displaying that proper amount of anxiety about Miss Maude’s curls which she should have displayed. But all the reading, and

learning, and thinking, and wondering, and even hoping, never yet spoilt her disposition, or made her other than she was, a thoroughly good girl ; only she became more thoughtful altogether, quieter, more like a lady than ever ; more careful about her dress, less childish. A new look stole over her face, and a new light came into her large eyes ; and at home, as she read hour after hour to her father, he would sit there gazing, more than listening, and murmur to himself—

“ Bless me ! what an angel the child is ! ”

But to the story.

It was a merry time at Carlingsford, the house full of guests, and Janie and Maude were in high spirits.

There was to be a ball the next evening, and excitement was at its height.

“ I am going to the conservatory to get a flower for my hair, Maude,” said Janie,

as they met in the hall ; " shall I get you one ?"

" I don't advise you to go there, Janie. Monsieur le Comte is there, and Mrs.—you know who !"

" Oh, I can't help that ! I cannot wait till they have done their talk."

And off she went.

Mrs. Brabazon was sitting on a low seat at the end of the conservatory, partially hidden from in-comers, but Janie could see she held a passion-flower in her hand, and she was looking up half coquettishly and half passionately into Monsieur de Chaumont's face, who was standing leaning against the wall beside her.

Handsome, aristocratic, with even something princely about him, was it a wonder that any woman should love him, even though youth was long since passed with him, and his hair was iron-grey ?

Mrs. Brabazon was a grand fair beauty, with large sleepy eyes ; only two or three people had seen them animated. Her mouth was her greatest beauty perhaps—such pouting, fascinating, tell-tale lips!—they expressed everything before she said it. Her hair was flowing and abundant; it hung in heavy classical tresses on her neck, and yet not heavy, for it was waving and *crêpé*, and when she moved, or when the wind raised it, it flew out like a golden aureole round her head, or like the glory we paint round an angel's face.

“A pretty picture,” said Janie, when she had stood a second, and had taken the scene in. No sooner were the words spoken, than she would have bitten her tongue out rather than have said them, but it was too late.

The Count coloured, but laughed good-humouredly, as though he did not much

care. After all, why should he ? his wife had been dead, poor soul, some years, and it was not likely her shade would haunt him.

Not so, however, Mrs. Brabazon ; she rose in wrath, her cheeks dyed the deepest crimson.

“ So, my dear young lady, you have been playing the eavesdropper, have you ? ”

“ On the contrary, I have been playing the admirer ! I have but just come in, and you have no notion, Mrs. Brabazon, how pretty and soft your dress, and the whole thing altogether looked. Won’t you sit so for your picture ? ”

“ I may as well now, for the subject will be public property, I presume. ”

Janie laughed a silvery little laugh.

“ Shall I begin or end with Mr. Brabazon ? ”

"Neither! for I shall tell him myself of your honourable conduct."

"Dear Mrs. Brabazon," said Janie, coming towards her with her hands full of flowers, "I really heard nothing! and really I should be very sorry indeed to intrude on any of your private affairs. But my own idea is, that you and the Count were saying nothing, but were, on the contrary, getting rather tired of each other, and rather stuck for conversation."

"Mrs. Brabazon had, I confess, yawned three times," said the Count.

They all knew it was a story, but they all knew, too, it was better to accept it for truth, and after apologies, and some slight laughing conversation between the ladies, Mrs. Brabazon returned to the house, to dress for dinner.

"I am going as far as the lodge,

Monsieur le Comte," said Janie, "will you come with me?"

"And why to the lodge?"

"To give an order to my *protégée* there, to be in attendance to wait on my august self to-morrow."

It was a lovely evening, and Janie was all too sorry when their arrival at the lodge brought their engrossing conversation to an end. The Count was as agreeable as he was gallant.

Annie herself came out to them. She had seen them coming down the hill, and was on the watch.

How pretty she looked standing under the shelter of that old porch, and how affectionately she raised her large eyes to her young mistress's face, and afterwards as she followed them a few steps through the garden, what a bright flower she herself

seemed amid all that gaudy display of nature.

"Oh! what a lovely rose that is, Annie!" exclaimed Janie, as she raised one tenderly on a standard.

"Will you have it, miss? yes! for your dress to-night," and before Janie could answer, Annie had cut it off and stood offering it to her.

"And might I be very bold and ask for one for my coat to-night?" said the Count.

Both the girls laughed, and Annie blushed as she felt the "gentleman's" eyes fixed on her, felt him watching her as she tripped about in her willing search, and then heard his peculiarly measured intonation of "Thank you," as he looked into her eyes and took the little bouquet from her trembling fingers.

"Isn't she pretty?" began Janie enthusiastically, as they walked back.

"Yes, indeed," said the Count; "tell me about her; she seems out of place here!"

"Oh! Maude could tell you better than I; she is devoted to her, and thinks of nothing else. Maude will tell you how clever she is, how quick, how well read, how wonderful, and I know not what besides—but I weary you."

"No! on the contrary!"

And by the time they had reached the house, Annie's story, Annie's past, present, and future had been pretty well discussed and canvassed between them.

The next evening, Janie's curls took an unusually long time, and Janie was unusually fidgety and anxious about them.

"I want Monsieur le Comte to be pleased," she said at last by way of extenuation, and she laughed.

"Was that Monsieur le Comte who asked for the rose yesterday, miss?"

"Yes, Annie!"

"What a grand gentleman!" said the girl.

"Mrs. Brabazon has been so civil all day," shouted Janie to Maude, whose room communicated with hers, "only such fun! The Count was alone in the billiard-room, reading the papers, and I went in to fetch a music-book, which was in the corner by the harmonium. It was difficult to get at, so the Count came to help me, and we were both sitting very ignominiously on the floor, when the door opened and Mrs. Brabazon looked in. She thought the room was empty, for the billiard-table hid us. 'How tiresome,' said she out loud to herself, 'I shall never get him alone again.' We looked in each other's faces, and for the life of me I could not help laughing, and so did he."

"Well, but better fun than that! Lady

Emily Arthur told me that after luncheon she heard Mrs. Brabazon ask him to be sure to sit by her at dinner, and Lady Emily, who is always up to fun, went straight up to him, and said gravely, 'She wanted to talk to him about something, and would he be sure to sit by *her* at dinner, and he said, 'Yes.' I wonder how it will end."

"You see, Annie, we are all very fond of this grand gentleman."

"He is very handsome," said the girl, thoughtfully; "is he as great and as good as he is grand?"

"We hope so," said Maude.

"I think so," said Janie.

As Annie watched the gay scene that night from her post of favour behind the tea-table, she felt a strange interest growing up in her mind for the "grand gentleman." She saw the most beautiful ladies—even Lady Chester herself—seemingly

anxious for his smile and attentions ; she saw him watched, referred to, by the most distinguished guests. She saw his unvarying urbanity, his never-failing conversation, his kindness, his princely bearing.

" Ah ! " sighed Annie to herself, as she took up her tea-pot, " he must be a wonderful man."

" A cup of tea, if you please," said a grave, soft voice in her ear ; the same voice that had said " Thank you," yesterday. Her hand trembled as she proceeded to obey, never daring to look up.

" You do not smile on us to-night, little one," said the grave voice. " Are you frightened at so many grandly dressed people ? Your rose droops not its head, you see, from any such false feeling."


She looked up in sheer amazement, and there, true enough, was the rose, yesterday's rose, her rose, in his button-hole.

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"I love flowers, too, you see," said he, smiling. "But where is the tea? Lady Chester will be getting impatient, I fear."

At a distance, always surrounded, Annie saw him at intervals during the evening, but he did not speak to her again. Once she caught him looking at her as he was leaning against a wall, apparently listening to the conversation of two English lords.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ATURE always seems to me so peculiarly sympathising at this hour ; the solitary note of some restless bird, the whisper of the trees, the subdued breath of the evening breeze, the odour of the flowers, the buzz of the home-ward-flying bee, and, above all, the bright, calm stars, looking down upon us out of their sea of blue,—do you not think so, little one?—or is it not that nature listens to us, or is any nearer to us now than ever she is, but that our hearts are more attuned to her, and our ears more in accord with her har-

monies, and we more willing to give up our time and thoughts to her when our work and worries are over ?”

The speaker was Monsieur le Comte de Chaumont. He was leaning over a little wooden gate in the fast depths of a wood. Annie Dasent was listening to him.

“It is very beautiful,” she said, in a soft, awe-struck voice.

“Do you love this hour, too, little one ?”

She blushed as she whispered, “Yes,” never daring to look up to his earnest, animated gaze.

“Tell me why you love it ?” asked he. “I love it ; I always look forward to it because I love those great dark eyes of yours gaining light from my poor words ; I love to see them straining out to the dark, dim future ; I love to hear your simple ques-

tions, and I love to feel your tiny hand softly and trustingly put in mine like I have it now. Tell me now why you love it."

And he settled himself more comfortably to hear as he took another whiff from his cigar, and as though he would eke out his luxury as long and enjoy it to the full as much as he could.

"I love it because everything is so beautiful, and everything looks more beautiful when you come. There is a different light on everything, and everything seems to smile. Everything now, though, has a different meaning, a different sense to what it used to have since I began to read and to learn, and since you began to teach me. Then, too, I love it, because—because you are so good and so grand, and because it is all so wonderful that you should leave all those beautiful, clever ladies up at the

house, and come down every evening, when it doesn't rain, to talk to me. I sometimes think it is a dream, a very, very sweet dream."

"Dream on, sweet one," murmured he, and he rested his hand on her head for a moment or two, half dreaming himself.

And the stars looked down and listened, and the trees whispered among themselves, and seemed to be saying they would shelter and love her always, and Annie, in her heart of hearts, dreamed on, wondering much.

The scene always hallowed him to her. The spirit of loveliness always seemed to her to be there, influencing her, and the spirit of loveliness to her always seemed to be God.

"I always feel better," she said to him one bright moonlight night, when the broken silvery rays came glinting through the thick boughs as they swayed in the

breeze, "when I see anything very lovely, for I always think God is near."

Much did she wonder about it all. Much did she wonder at the beautiful books he gave her ; much at his unvarying kindness ; much, sometimes, at his strange, odd, broken expressions ; much at the strange alternations in that curious, earnest, passionate voice of his ; much did she wonder at his coming to her so constantly. At last she found two reasons for it, and quaintly, after thinking awhile, she put her thoughts into words for his benefit.

"I know now why you come," she said, looking up with a child-like smile of simple faith into his deep grey eyes, which sometimes made her tremble. "You think I am clever—they have told you so—and you are interested in anything clever ; and then you think to do me good, and make

me better, and so, for the love of Christ, you come."

He had looked down into her trusting face, and something very like a tear had gathered in his eyes. He had not answered her just then.

"And you are so good," went on Annie; "you would not have them know what you are trying to do, and so you will not let me tell anybody that you come, and that you try to teach and improve me. I wish I were as good as you."

"Child! child!" said he, hoarsely, "you are ever so much better than I am. Look, I must go, child. Perhaps I may not see you again."

And he took her face in both his hands, and kissing her on her forehead, pressing his lips there, "God bless you," he whispered, and was gone.

What was it? A sudden flash of re-

morse that had thrilled through him,—a sudden remembrance of some pure time long, long ago,—some breath wafted to him in innocent, childish talk,—who knows?

It was a sudden good resolve. He hates himself now. Look at him as he strides angrily up the carriage road—

“Caste! caste! is it to stop me thus? Am I to be balked of my happiness now? Now, when I have laid my plans, as never lover courted lady? Now, when I have schemed, deceived, lied? What now?”

He fancied he heard steps, and he stopped to listen and to think. We said the scene hallowed him always to Annie, and he—ah! with what different eyes men see, and how differently does the same air sound to different ears. Nature to Annie was life, and learning, and power, and God. To de Chaumont *he* was life, learning,

power, and man. The song he heard was for *his* gratification, and the influence to be wielded to his will. The sight he saw was so much inanimation, to be read according to his own end. Annie was partly right in her simple thought, that he had begun by being merely interested in her. Great men will stoop to dissect an insect, will take an interest in its wriggings, even find excitement in the research, and finally never give up the pursuit till they succeed. De Chaumont had stayed on at Carlingsford, attracted by Annie. At first interest, then liking, amusement, and finally love. Yes, now it is love, with all its tyranny, all its torments.

“C'est plus fort que moi!” said he, desperately, as he re-entered Carlingsford.

No one knew his secret, not even Annie herself. He always went out for his even-

ing walk by himself to smoke. He was supposed to be writing a book, and to need a certain time to himself for meditation.

No one asked where he went, but he generally recounted some meeting or some small adventure that had not taken place, to satisfy curiosity. He was also an artist, when he liked ; and he was painting Janie's picture as an occupation and as an excuse for staying on. No praise is due to him for this either, for the picture progressed but slowly. Time was pleasant to both, and he knew it; daily he saw in Janie's bright eyes that he was no longer indifferent to her.

And the bright days flew by; summer went, and golden autumn came. Music and poetry and painting flourished at Carlingsford. Laughter was heard there all day, smiles wreathed mutually when eyes

met, and life seemed a joyous thing at Carlingsford.

But behind all this brightness there was a cloud on the horizon. The sunshine was golden enough now, and the world seemed but a great garden for butterflies to fly in ; but beyond it all another dawn was breaking. It came sometimes as a sigh in the midst of a song, or as a sudden pain at one's heart reminds one that one will not always laugh.

There was a day when consternation dawned at Carlingsford. The happy dream was over, and the waking was rough indeed. No laughter, no rippling smiles, no joyous songs to-day. A girl writhing on the floor, battling with her impetuous grief in Janie's room, and Maude praying in the next, Lady Chester sitting with old Mrs. Dasent in the Lodge, her hand in hers, and at their feet a letter.

"MOTHER, DARLING MOTHER,

"I am so happy! He made me his wife this morning; his happy, proud little wife. I would have told you, dear, we were going, but it was all so hurried and dreadful. I left a letter for you, dear, and you will get this by a messenger, he says. You could not have kept it, you know, you must have told somebody. And we will come back very soon, tell father, and see you as soon as Lady Chester and the young ladies forgive us. Oh, mother! he is so good, and so proud, and so brave.

"Your loving

"ANNIE."

"Let us believe, let us hope, let us pray it is true, dear Mrs. Dasent," Lady Chester was saying, "he seemed such a perfect, true, and upright gentleman. He is great in his own country, I believe. Lord Chester

met him in London, and liked him so much. Why did he keep him so long?"

"Ah! if we could only foresee!"

Lady Chester, too, had had a note.

"C'était plus fort que moi. Pardon! She has written to her mother. She has written the truth. We leave England at once for a very short time.

"MAURICE DE CHAUMONT."

"If it is all true, and straightforward, and honest," reasoned Lady Chester, "why is he so horridly ashamed of himself? A man has been won by a pretty face before now."

Then they heard nothing for some few days, then a letter had come from Paris, breathing still of happiness, and pride, and pleasure, and Annie's glory in her husband, and all the fine places she was going to, and

all the fine people she was seeing. Then at long intervals came letters—always from different places, and leaving poor Mrs. Dasent far behind in their descriptions and style. Then a reserve seemed to steal over them, and then the husband was never mentioned. Then again came a burst about “my baby, my beautiful boy,” and Annie, only a new Annie, was all there again. Then intervals again ; at last silence, complete silence, and then Mrs. Dasent, having gone through anxiety and suspense indescribable, at last laid down all her troubles, and died.

So the link seemed broken, and Annie and De Chaumont disappeared out of the Chesters world, and the story seemed to have become a myth of the middle ages.

Janie thought differently, but Janie was the only one.

Was it a marriage ? No ; there had

been a form to please Annie, in those days easily pleased, but De Chaumont was a Roman Catholic, and Annie a Protestant. The one very simple form, he even spelling his name wrong, to make insecurity doubly insecure, that they went through, was thoroughly empty and illegal.

“My religion has nothing to do with it,” he said to her, in his deep, grave voice. “All religions are good, if we only believe in them, and act up to our belief in them. Protestantism is good, and Roman Catholicism, and Mahomedanism, and the worship of the Sun. Only be true.”

She listened, and believed.

Her great desire was to be large-minded and liberal. Her scraps of reading had given her quaint odds and ends of thought ; and at that time you had only to string a few long words together, and look earnest about it, and you could get her to ac-

cept almost any doctrine as good in its way.

It was a wandering, restless life then they led. Here to-day, gone to-morrow. Bursts of merriment, feasting, and display, and then long, silent journeys to some distant place. De Chaumont was rich, and never spared expense. Then the baby was born, and where she found her greatest joy he would look on bored.

Then, too soon, it came upon him that he was tiring of her, and then what a fearful time for both! But she did not see it, did not wholly understand it till long afterwards.

So the weary days lagged on, and she decked out her beauty to please him, but lost all joy in it herself.

Let us hurry on. The end came at last. He left her in a little house at St. Germain he had bought and furnished for her there,

left her, he said, for a time, on urgent business, but the time never wore away. Letters there were one or two—a visit, even, once or twice, when something of the old affection seemed to be pleading for her through his eyes, but he always went away again, and at last came a letter saying he should have to go away a long way, and left money, and directions, and so on. That ought to have told her, but it didn't—not directly, at least.

At last there came another letter—a lawyer's letter—announcing his marriage, telling her her own was void, explaining about an allowance, and precluding all answer. Then she rose in her wrath, spurned the letter with her heel, tearing his other letters from their resting-place, threw them in the fire, finally fell prone on the floor face forward, and might have died had not the boy's sweet voice sounded in her ear,

"Mother! mother!" and she woke to the fact of the kind old Frenchwomen standing round, pitying and helping her.

And then next day the curé had come to her, and then friends had flocked to her; friends that her sweet eyes and pretty ways and humble words had won for her; and her boy looked up to her helplessly and hopefully from the depths of his great fathomless blue eyes, and she had roused herself and vowed to live "for the love of Christ," who was so good to her, and had given her friends in her misery.

Even then she might have gone home. Her parents were still alive, and the Chesters would never have frowned upon her. But pride forbade it. Was this the end of her dream? Her mother's dreary forebodings, then, were right! So she put all thought of home and of the "old place" away with a shudder, and lived

on with her child in the quiet French town.

Only one thing she hated—his money !

Must she take it ? Feverishly she spurred on her boy's lessons ; feverishly she learnt that she might help him on, help him sooner to be a man and to earn money that that accursed gold might be returned.

Another thought she had, a thought she never told.

" I will be praised ; I will meet him yet in the world, fallen, lost, dishonoured though now I may be. He shall hear of the fair, the accomplished, the——" she stopped—"and he shall see me."

Years glided by. She was praised and beloved for her charity, for her womanliness, her beauty, her Christian love, her knowledge, her accomplishments. They told her sad story with bated breath, and friends clustered round her. The boy had

ceased to prattle about his father ; he had learnt there must be some reason for his mother's "Hush!" and she had told him he should know some day. An intelligent, handsome, bright-eyed boy he was, with generous impulses, and a manly pride.

He was about sixteen, and it was just before he was going to the college of St. Omer, that his mother called him in one evening from the rocks, begging him to leave the sailors and the boats.

"What, to help you with your fusty books, mother?"

"No, dear ; I want to talk to you."

He came bounding over to her in a moment, and then, with tears in her eyes, sitting with him on the top of the cliff, she told him the story as best she might.

He rushed away from her straight, and it was nearly ten o'clock when she heard his step on the gravel outside.

"Thank God," said she, falling on her knees, "he does not hate me quite."

"Mother," said he, coming up to her quite quickly, with a new, sweet light shining in his loving, faithful eyes, "I have been thinking it all over, and I shall be a man soon. And you and I will be great yet, and we will be honoured and respected and loved in our own way, and for ourselves, darling mother, as I love you."

"My own boy!" said she, choking on his neck.

"Mother," said he, presently, colouring painfully. "My name—it isn't any name, is it?"

"Vernon, dear. I took it because it is a quiet, unobtrusive name."

"Yes; Christopher Vernon. As good as any other."

## CHAPTER V.



HEN had begun weary days for Annie—the battle of life for her boy and for her—woman's fate—to sit quiet and wait. Solitude with all its horrors, and retrospection. No wonder her disposition had somewhat changed ; no wonder the bitter thought that never left her sowed seeds of evil in her nature. Sin bears fruit besides that of its own visible and intentional sowing. The old feeling of honest pride which urged her to hate his money when love for him was not quite dead in her heart, though she knew

it not, had gone, and was replaced in time by a feeling of feverish hate, of longing for revenge, of longing to bring sorrow and shame, and every pecuniary claim she could upon him. Money, too, she must have to help her son forward, and who so fit to provide it as his rich and prosperous father? But she had been gentle and silent so long, was so helpless now, there was nothing for it but to take the money, regularly paid by some banking-house in Paris, and wait. The flame smouldered on in her heart, and was none the less powerful that it could not burst forth at once.

And Christopher, the boy?

That night when she had told him his history, in a storm of passion as he rushed away, he had first longed to go anywhere away—away from home, mother, friends, school-fellows, all, and never be heard of more. Then as the sea murmured out its

monotonous wailing, ever the same, to all his passionate words, and as the stars looked down so calmly, coldly pitying ; as the moon came out from behind the clouds, and lit up the little church tower, and made silver lines on the roofs of the houses, and as he saw his own home and the light burning in the room there, he thought of his mother weeping, praying on her knees, and new thoughts rose within him. The iron had, indeed, entered into his soul in that first half-hour, and he was altered, perhaps for ever, but still through it all there was his love for his mother, and when—no dishonour to him—at last the tears came, hot, passionate, scalding tears wrung from the very bottom of his heart, then reason began to come again, too. Sorrow makes men of many of us ; and, after all, it was no fault of his, or of hers—no, or of hers—they had both been sinned

against. Even now, his lips would frame no curse against that father whom he remembered vaguely as some cold, passionless figure, never loved, and always feared, in the fading evanescent visions of his past childhood. Fate had been unkind to both of them, he went on to himself, but he would fight against fate, and overcome it.

And from that day fate had changed her tactics with regard to him, as she often does when she sees men expect nothing of her, leave off railing at her, and try to help themselves. Much had he to go through, many obstacles to surmount, many reverses to bear, much self-control to exercise, much pride to cast to the winds, much labour, and perseverance, and weary, weary toil needed he. But early he had made up his mind what his bed should be, and he stuck to it. All idle pleasure, all self-gratifica-

tion, woman's love, joyous society, all extravagance, were to be banished from his category. They were simply to have no place in his existence. All pride, all vanity, all display—simply, he was not to know what they were. Work, progress, success at any cost were his watchwords.

This, his dreary life! Prosperity, for the sake of itself, he sought it not, but for the sake of that dumb, smouldering fire of rage which had been lit in his soul that night in the little French sea-side town, and which must be satisfied.

Well, it was being satisfied. He had begun by raising himself up friends at his school; this had continued with more useful results at his college. Then he had been started in a Government office in England, but wearying of this, yet still remaining there, as clinging to that straw till he should have some surer refuge, he had

written and written so perseveringly, used his brains so energetically, persecuted editors, managers, publishers, so perseveringly, enlisting friends (and there Fate had really been kind to him, sending him across the right men's paths at the right moments) on his side, that success was, indeed, his. Smiles were showered on him; envy had to cringe and to smile, and honest criticism acknowledged him with pride. His plays were played to crowded audiences that never grew less, and his name shouted till his modest ears tingled again, and yet he cared not for it. Often he would sit listless, abstracted, despising the excited crowd that was calling for him so enthusiastically, gloomy in the corner of his box, with a shade on his brow, and sometimes a tear of despair in his calm blue eye.

Was he dissatisfied? Was not his success great enough? What did he want?

Was it not enough that men should shout his name, should smile and greet him when they saw him, just for the very love and honour they bore him? Were not fame and wealth all-sufficing food? Did he seek a grander triumph? Did he want to lead men to victory, and trample on the necks of nations? Was it not enough that his books were read all over the world, and his name and intellect honoured everywhere? Did he need the praise to come nearer to him? Did he need to feel the caressing breath on his weary cheek, to touch the sympathising hands, to feel that "home" and "heart" were his possession? But there they were in the mass, was not that enough? He could hardly have said perhaps what he wanted. He could hardly have told what he hardly knew, that he hated and despised men for praising him so; that he had won success, indeed, be-

cause he had felt obliged, but that he cared nothing at all for it.

There were three things he loved in the world,—his mother,—his little inner room, which we have seen, and where he worked,—and Lady Lorraine Tremeneere.

That little inner room he loved, because there he worked, and he loved his work, not for its results, but for itself, and because it took him away from his thoughts. Dirty and untidy and blotched and unfurnished as the room was, he loved it dearly.

“ I am myself there,” he said once ; “ I was nothing but untidiness and raw material and thought. The other room is the result, and, I hate all results.”

He hated all his powerful friends too, though he hated himself for doing it ; but “ They have been kind to me, I am under obligations to them, and perhaps cannot ever pay them back ; they were neces-

sities, and steps in the way, I know, therefore they are hateful to me."

Lady Lorraine Tremenheere was the one bright star in his life. When she was there, then all bad thoughts, all despair, all discontent, left him. He felt a different being. Her smile on his heart was like an April shower on a rare flower-garden, which brings out with double force its beauties and sweet scents, washing away the dust from the weary leaves, and raising with tenderness the drooping heads and closing petals.

She herself knew nothing at all about this. He had been introduced to her at Lord Clieveden's house by some parliamentary colleague of his, introduced as a "lion;" and Lady Lorraine, sharing the usual feminine mania for "lions," had instantly endeavoured to be civil to him, and her "pleasant smile" had secured him all too surely.

To do her justice, Lorraine really took pleasure in his society; he was so clever, so original, so refreshing after everybody else. Then, too, he listened so kindly to her, let her say what she liked, never snubbed her except when he could not help it, and then she liked it! It was pleasant being snubbed; so new! no one else did it.

Lorraine, too, was clever; and if there was just a little shade of vanity in liking to be talked to and listened to by a "lion," still there was some real staple gratification in the conversation she had with him.

It was a "purely intellectual friendship," she flattered herself. If he had talked of love, she would have hated him. As it was, she looked up to him, questioned him in a difficulty, was fearful always of offending him, and would have been hurt if she thought he had forgotten her.

At the same time, in her little worldly heart,—a woman has two or three hearts, wherewith she sees things in different aspects,—she looked down upon him. In society he was nothing—at least, no one could ever tell her who he was; and though he was “a lion,” still “lions” don’t last for ever.

As an intellect, as a man, as a personal friend, she liked him; but as a guest, in making up a good dinner-party for her father’s table, he was all very well once in a way, but as an *habitué*, decidedly not.

So much for human nature, thanks to society.

Now, in her deep distress, on the day when Walter Carew told her he must leave England in all probability, in her helpless research for some means of helping him, she had bethought herself of her old passion for scribbling, which she had formerly

much indulged, and in turning about in her mind for some means of utilising it, she had remembered her friend, the lion, Christopher Vernon.

“He will help me, he will give me something to do.”

So she resolved to break through the silence that had latterly fallen on their correspondence, and boldly to ask for his aid.

But her pride rather stuck in her way.

She asked for it as for another. “A pretty little woman, who must be helped. She can write, and would do anything to earn a little.”

In reality, Lorraine only hoped for an opening, a chance of some literary employment, which she knew not how else to apply for. She forgot that whatever opening she thus gained, it would only be through Christopher Vernon, and must continue to

be so. Any independent footing must still be a long way off.

How was he to help her? Work! the whole world wanted work! and besides, what could she do?

"Tell her to stitch, or to sew, or to go out charring; writing is such weary, weary work," he wrote to Lorraine. And then in a postscript, "I do not mean to be heartless; I will do what I can for your *protégée*."

The result of the postscript was that a huge mass of untidy manuscript arrived in Grosvenor Square. "To be copied at so much a page till I can find something else."

A horrible difficulty for Lorraine when he knew her handwriting so well.

"This won't do," wrote Lorraine on it in pencil, laughing at herself as she did so, and sent it back. "She is a lady, and wants to compose."

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It is to be feared that Christopher used queer language about the lady wanting to compose. However, he took a hansom, and went up to Grosvenor Square himself.

“Is Lady Lorraine at home?”

“Not at home,” answered the uncompromising domestic.

## CHAPTER VI.



SOME several chapters back we left Walter Carew and Charley Dalrymple standing on a door-step together after a ball, and listening to the retreating roll of Lord Clieveden's carriage.

"Are you ready to leave? Shall we go together?"

The result of which was, that in a few moments they were walking arm-in-arm down the street together, questioning each other, and answering, only to question again, as fast friends generally do.

At first Carew felt diffident about telling his friend about his affairs and his difficulties, but he knew well enough that truth will out; he knew, too, that Dalrymple was trustworthy if any one was, so presently he made a clean breast of it.

“My dear fellow, this is grave indeed! Can nothing be done?’ Why did you not tell me sooner, before the mischief had become so serious? I am almost angry with you.”

They talked over the pros and cons of different schemes far into the night, and when Dalrymple got up to go away, for he had been sitting in Carew’s room, he said, as he shook hands—

“When shall I see you again, Walter? By-the-by, why not come down with me to Carlingsford to-morrow? It’s Saturday, and they begged me to bring some one for Sunday. They will be so delighted to see

you. My sisters are there, and they have some people."

"My dear Dalrymple, I am not fit for society just now. I think of nothing but my troubles, and can't talk about them, as they are still among the things not generally known, and they would hardly amuse if they were."

"Nonsense! not fit for society! what has come to you? Am I society? Are we society? Is Carlingsford society to you? Come, Carew."

"But the solemnity of my countenance may be appalling!"

"Nonsense again! I shall call for you at five to-morrow, so be ready."

Which came to pass, and which explains why we see Carew in his room at Carlingsford on Sunday afternoon, sitting at a table covered with correspondence, and looking the picture of misery. He had begged for

the afternoon in solitude, and Charley Dalrymple had accorded it.

As he began to examine the pile of letters in front of him, and as he attempted to sort them, his heart began to fail him for very trouble. He covered his face with his hands, and sat motionless.

In that quiet hour, what thoughts filled his mind! His early beginning, so bright, so full of promise. Then losses, difficulties, rash bets at race meetings, miserable nights—kindnesses from friends, securities, loans, obligations he was under—fair faces smiling upon him, eyes bright with love and hope, flirtations he had indulged in, affections he had trifled with, women he had indeed loved, hopes he had himself cherished, dreams he had dreamed all too vividly, now, all to be dispelled and dashed to the ground.

All was to be left! home, regiment,

friends, country ! and he was to try his fortune far away, where, he knew not yet ! No wonder he was sad ! the thoughts were stifling. He got up and threw open his window, and looked out sullenly on the prospect. Spring had not yet deepened into summer. The varied hues of the trees were all tender, soft and bright ; the grass was golden in the sunshine with butter-cups, and its myriad flowers. Down through the valley the park stretched away, wood and stream in beauty mingling ; longer and longer spread the shadows, and the clouds grew in glory every minute. No wonder he sighed to leave England. And as he stood there thinking, something brought Lorraine to his mind.

“ Dear Lorraine ! ” said he, out loud.

Dalrymple, sitting smoking on the bench below, heard it.

And then, taking out his pocket-book,

Carew drew out her picture, and looked on it thoughtfully.

“Dear, pretty Lorraine, will she miss me much? She is so good, so pure, so beautiful. I was never any comfort to her, I think, though. She has said so to please me. She is so far above me. I do but weary her, and drag her down with my troubles. But she may miss my troubling. Will they be very kind to her, I wonder? She is so sensitive, she needs some one to tell her thoughts to—troubles she hardly has, at least to her they fade in the telling. She is so strong and proud, almost above troubles—certainly above acknowledging them. Will they be very kind to her? I wish she would take to Dalrymple again, he is such a good fellow—but I don’t think she will.”

Dalrymple, sitting on the bench below, vowed in his innermost heart that she

should. He was piqued at the doubt. He had always cared for her. Why should she not care for him ?

Then Carew, turning back to the table, really began to set to work. First there were some creditors who must be attended to and answered somehow. Then there was a long, miserable letter from Lord Pauncefort. This must be answered—answered, too, with a cheerfulness he did not feel, and breathing of consolation which was impossible and unreasonable; and then, “as a plum,” he said to himself, he wrote a note to Lorraine, for she had begged him to come and see her soon, and here he was in the country, instead of paying his usual Sunday visit in Grosvenor Square.

It was a manly, calm little note.

“I am not sure it is not better for me to go somewhere, wherever it is, or do something, than go on leading the unprofitable

life I am. Of course I am very sorry to leave you, and other old friends." And then he stopped.

Lorraine always put her warmest feelings into her letters ; Carew always kept his till they met.

And then, after that, Carew got his cigar-case and went down to find Dalrymple ; and a long, long talk they had of affairs, money, and Lady Lorraine till dinner-time.

It is curious to find another generation here at smiling Carlingsford. The gardens and terraces and the conservatory are the same, but the people are old now. Lord and Lady Chester are merry as ever, but their hair has changed its colour slightly, and her ladyship is not quite so much " up to fun " as when we saw her before. Her daughters, Katie and Maude, very much resemble the Janie and Maude of old days, very much resemble them in disposition

and avocations. The Maude of the past is married, and is a smiling mother of a happy family. Janie is here, not much altered, only she is called "Aunt Jane" now. Lord Chester says she is still a sunbeam in the house.

Dalrymple, the heir, the much-loved son, the petted brother, the favourite of the neighbours and tenants, is a handsome young fellow of five-and-twenty. He is essentially "a good fellow," and, more than this, has brains. He is to be a "great man" some day.

They were hardly more than a family party at dinner. There was an old astronomer staying in the house; an old Scotch lady, Mrs. Donald Maclean, and her son; Sir John and Lady Vivian, and "Aunt Jane;" but they were very merry, and Carew made them laugh much with his stories, as was his wont.

After dinner they kept the drawing-room windows open, for it was a warm and lovely night, and the old astronomer was endeavouring to tempt Lady Chester outside.

"How pretty Lady Chester looks now!" said Carew, as he watched her standing by the window in her blue dinner-dress, holding up a white woollen shawl, half-willing and half unwilling to put it on.

"But I am puzzled and bewildered, Mr. Schulz, with your theories, and I begin to wish I knew nothing."

"But that is so lamentable, my lady. Now come out, I pray. I can explain so much better with the heavenly bodies there before us."

With a little mock gesture of martyrdom, out she went.

"Why should we not all go out?" said Katie, who was the youngest and the most privileged. "Come, Charley—come, Mr.

Maclean—come, Aunt Jane—come, Mr. Carew.”

“ I shall not come, because you call me last,” said Carew.

“ Oh! I beg your pardon, I am sure! It was, of course, to hide my great anxiety for your society. Come, Charley.”

But Charley was sleepy, preferred his coffee, and it was some time ere, by dint of much teasing and pulling, the whole party stood arrayed in shawls and wraps outside.

Carew and Katie, always fast friends, ran on together till they reached Lady Chester and Mr. Schulz. By degrees afterwards they all joined in a solemn procession towards the lodge.

Just such a night we remember here, once long years ago; no noisy merriment then was heard, but soft speeches were interchanged, and the moon shone on just the same as now.

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"You see, Mr. Schulz, you are inconsistent," said Lady Chester. "Don't think I am going to argue with you, because I can't; but you certainly said you expected we shall all live in the sun after we are dead."

"Yes, certainly."

"But there is more than one sun."

"Our solar system is but a little corner of the universe."

"But how do you reconcile this with your belief that we shall all be together after death? You make so many places for us to go to, we shall never find each other I am sure."

"Yes, ultimately."

"Ah! in cycles of ages. Then we shall have forgotten one another."

"No! my lady, we cannot forget."

"But then you said life hereafter is a continuation of this life! According to

your sun and planet theory, it seems to me a beginning of a new life."

"Only as a soul, transformed into another body, lives again."

"There again, you say, if death comes upon us before we are fully prepared for life hereafter, we have to begin again—in another human body. Now, this must seriously affect our meeting our friends."

"Now, my lady, just let me explain."

"No! Mr. Schulz. I will have my own way on Sunday, and I will not hear another word. I don't believe in your telescopes, or your theories, or your discoveries—forgive me! but it's Sunday, and a beautiful night. I believe—what I like to believe, not that Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, &c., are habitable, which is tiresome and endless work, but that they are stars, put up there along with the sun and the moon to light us, and to teach us the glory of the

universe ; and, in fact, only for our benefit. There now, that may be a vulgar belief, but I am comfortable."

"Well, it is your English Sunday, so I do not say a word ; only that I know Lady Chester to be charming and clever, and esteemed beyond many, and that I know she *does* listen to great discoveries, and does believe the evidence of reason, and does interest herself in the truth, I should be angry and disgusted, but—"

"Well done, Herr Schulz !" laughed Dalrymple ; "you have kept your temper well in the face of blind ignorance and superstition. Come and have a wrangle with me. I should enjoy it."

And the two walked off together.

"Who lives here ?" asked Carew, as they stood leaning over the garden gate.

There was a silence.

"Tell him, Jane," said Lady Chester, and she moved on with the children.

"We do not often talk of it," said Aunt Jane. "But it is a sad little story. Only a very old man, Dasent by name, lives here now."

And she told him the tale, which was her tale as well. But she said nothing of her share in it; only she spoke softly, as though she were interested in the people.

"I suppose there was no marriage," she added, after a pause.

"No, most probably not, or they would have come back. Do you know nothing more of them?"

"Nothing! I fancy they must be abroad somewhere. I fancy Monsieur de Chaumont is dead; I saw a notice once in a paper when I was abroad at a little inn in Switzerland, but I cannot be sure."

"It is a mournful little story, and the

uncertainty must be most distressing to the old man ; I always think suspense is one of the greatest trials in life."

He was perhaps half thinking of his own troubles and uncertain lot just then.

"The story casts a seeming sadness over the place, does it not ?" he went on ; "just a shadow over the otherwise faultless beauty of the spot."

"Ah !" said Aunt Jane, as she took his arm, and they followed the others up the hill, and then stopped to look back a moment—"I often wish we could forget—everything !"

Was that a tear Carew saw glistening in the moonlight on her cheek ?

So much for woman's inconstancy !

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When a woman tries very hard, she is often astonished at her first successes. Doors seem to open unbid, friends seem to spring up unexpectedly, even wit and brains sprout forth in an exceptional and illogical manner. So with Lorraine. She had begun blindly. "I must write," she said, and forthwith she had asked herself what, and then commenced a course of investigation, wondering, attempting, failing, reading—seeking for subjects, seeking for patronage, trying first for refuge in a paper's columns, then for shelter in magazine pages, and finally casting cartloads of MSS. on Christopher Vernon's mercy till Hawkins and the postman, and even Christopher himself, began to think he had gone mad in his love-making.

But he let it all come. The very sending gave hope, he knew, and Lorraine wrote and wrote.

## CHAPTER VII.



IT was a weary season to Lorraine. Weary, that is for the "strain of work" she was putting upon herself, weary for the thoughts that came crowding upon her, and weary for the pleasure that had to be gone through. Since first the news of Carew's difficulties had come to her, and since she had vowed her first helpless vow to help him somehow, she had never flinched from her resolve, or forgotten it for an instant. Money must be got, and money she would get.

## THE LAST LETTER

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but he let it all come. The very something  
he knew, and Lorraine wrote  
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"The handwriting is like yours," he said once.

"Ah, yes!" said she, carelessly; "they are like, and mine resembles hers more than ever, since I have copied so much for her."

A mystifying answer, which succeeded in its mission. It was a strange inconsistent life that Lorraine was leading then. Outwardly, a fashionable, pleasure-seeking, ambitious, and worldly life, and really, a hard-working, even to slavery, sentimental, most unselfish life. The work was not for herself, if it had been, she could not have stuck to it so well, but it was for one who knew nothing about it, who was treated merely with friendship, who often thought himself coldly treated, and who had never been allowed to speak a word of love to her in his life. All the time that she was working for him, reading feverishly, that

she might be able to write for him, writing carefully, or madly, or desperately, or hopefully, or ambitiously, it was only care, madness, desperation, hope, ambition, for his sake. To see her at her notes and cards, and that everlasting "red book," you would have thought there lay her ambitions, her dreams, her hopes, her cares. To see her riding in the park on Water King, seemingly so blithe and gay, you would have thought a joyous life, a little showing off, and "something of flirtation," was the be-all and end-all of existence. Doing the honours at her father's house, in the full-blown plumage of diamonds and lace, in her fancy ball-dress, ever smiling, ever gay, Walter Carew might well ask himself had she a heart, or at least any room in it to think of him and his troubles, and Christopher Vernon might indeed wonder to himself how she found time or charity to

give a moment's consideration to a poor little friend, toiling for a living—much more how such a gay, worldly little butterfly, bent on sipping the sweets from every flower that came in her way, could ever have the patience to copy out some dull and generally badly-written paper by this same poor toiling little friend.

But to us who see both sides of the picture, the greater marvel is, perhaps, the continual gaiety and the ever-seeming fund of spirits and enjoyment, when purpose and effort have so deeply rooted themselves in the same heart! Perhaps the curtain might be lifted to disclose the same conflict in other hearts, considered to be wholly given up to pleasure, vanity, and the sickly, aimless toil and joy society affords.

To see Lorraine up early in her little sitting-room at Grosvenor Square—never mind how late the revels of the night

before—to see her sitting there, in her loose “peignoir,” her hair over her shoulders, natural and free ; her eyes bent on the page, following with eager glance the swift pen as it runs rapidly over the paper, to watch the varying expressions of her mobile face, now sad, now merry, now perplexed, now excited ; to see her little hands turn restlessly and nervously, perhaps to some book of reference ; to note the queer incongruity of such a frail, delicate, beautiful being, battling in impotent wrath with some dusty old tome, which will not readily yield up its treasure to her feeble, though femininely quick understanding ; and then, when she has mastered a question, solved a difficulty, found the needful expression, to note the look of triumph, followed by a broad smile of lasting content, settling itself on the intelligent countenance, like the sun’s bright generous glory when a shower has kept his

face away from us in April—to see Lorraine then and thus, there is small doubt left where she finds her pleasure, or which part of the day she considers her toil.

Her cousin, Lady Mary, wondered at her; wondered very much when turning round, she frequently found Lorraine had slipped noiselessly and quietly away. “What does she do in her little room all by herself?” Lady Mary would ask herself. Wondered at Lorraine’s frequent hasty expressions at visitors who would come, and who would not go; wondered at the avidity with which she would clutch at an afternoon at home, with no drive, calling, or “at homes” to be done; wondered at her sudden love of economy, and lack of vanity.

As for Lorraine herself, she was being pulled two ways. “Indeed, my right hand knoweth not what my left hand doeth,”

she would think to herself, regretfully. Time and money were being lavished on things she cared not for by one hand, while the other was struggling feverishly for both.

And yet she was happy, comparatively so, just because she was doing something. So happy that she needed not, as yet, to indulge in any regretful language to Carew about their parting ; said nothing of her fear for the future ; seemed to him to be walled up in a whirl of fashionable excitements—to have forgotten him and his troubles. That her work, that her daily effort was the only expression she could yet trust herself, and which did indeed take away necessity for any other, he never dreamed, any more than that she ever would work for him.

Meanwhile, a hoard—very small, it is true, but still a hoard—was being raised

for him. Driblets of payment would come in, nerving her to fresh efforts. If she had known the histories of those payments, her pride might have suffered somewhat, the pen might have fallen from her hand, and she never have brought herself to write again.

Christopher Vernon sent her payment for things he sometimes just threw into the fire—she had not written enough to succeed at once. Some were better, and these he himself worked at, cut at, improved, and sent her excuses, with payment, putting it all on the required length. When they were printed, she seldom cared to read them, in such desperate haste was she for something else. Then she bethought herself she would try her hand at a story. "Surely there will be more independence there : here one must study style and space till nothing of oneself is left."

"My friend fancies she could do a story better," she wrote to Vernon. "Would you advise her to try?"

"Yes, let her try," wrote Christopher, and sighed. But in that he loved Lorraine he did not record the sigh.

So she began her story.

Love, of course, was its *motif*.

Love such as Lady Lorraine had sometimes dreamed of; a love far away from her experience, far from all prejudices of caste and ambition and worldly advantages. A case of love in a cottage, not much wealth, but happiness ever present. Only the cottage was far away beyond the seas, where large-leaved flowers filled the air with their scents, and bright-plumaged birds flew about, and the waves kissed the shore in languid love, and the sun smiled down always a glorious smile.

And, so writing, one day she read over

what she had written, and, as she read, she recognised the two by their conversation; she recognised the scenes, or what had inspired them, and she knew she had written her own tale. Then in a fit of—what was it? anger? hardly—she put it away, and for days the pen lay idle.

Then, one evening, coming in from a ball, weary and unstrung, she flew to it surreptitiously, as though to a forbidden sweet, and there read again that tale of happy love—the voyage out, the daily life there, where everything seemed to smile, and the hours seemed too short, where was no “world” to worry and jar and vex. How faithfully she had told it!

Then she rose, and half awe-struck at the discovery she had made, put the bundle of manuscript away, down down deep at the very bottom of a drawer.

“Mr. Vernon is in the drawing-room, my

lady," said one of the servants the next afternoon, knocking at the door of Lorraine's boudoir. "Lady Mary wished me to tell you, and said she must go out."

Lorraine had been sitting by herself, thinking.

"I will come in a minute," answered she.

The servants had hardly left the room after bringing in the tea, Lady Mary had barely gone out, when the door opened, and "Mr. Carew" was announced.

Now, if there was a young man of all those surrounding Lady Lorraine whom Christopher Vernon disliked, it was Walter Carew. He had an idea that Lorraine liked him, and in that case Carew was treating her badly. Then again he thought there was some understanding between them, but again, what?

The dislike was reciprocated by Carew

in full. He thought Christopher Vernon a snob, thought he attempted to monopolise Lorraine with no right, and wondered why she encouraged him with such a show of friendship.

Lorraine was fully conscious of the feelings of the two towards each other. Add to this her thought that she was hoping to help the one by means of the other, and the situation is forcible. If one had dreamed he was helping the other, or if the other had dreamed he was ever to receive such help, all effort on her part would have been henceforth useless.

But none of these thoughts were apparent.

They talked, gave each other tea, sugar, cream, even bread and butter, got up some small jokes, discussed balls and plays, and only showed weariness every now and then by bringing out their watches alternately,

looking grave for half a second, then settling themselves more firmly in their chairs, and resuming conversation with more seeming animation than ever.

Lorraine saw they were sitting each other out, smiled to herself, and hardly knew which she felt most inclined to favour. Both had to be talked to. She half dreaded being alone with Carew to-day, but she could not be uncivil to him in the slightest shade ; so, pouring out herself another cup of tea, she resolved to let things take their own course, and talked on unconcernedly.

But at last Christopher Vernon, the busy man, grew desperate.

“ I wanted to talk to you, Lady Lorraine,” said he, looking at her with intention.

Lorraine knew that as well as he did, but she merely smiled and made a little bow, to signify she was all attention, and

looked as if she had not the vaguest notion in the world what it could be about. He lowered his eyes, and began to draw a pattern on the carpet with his stick, as though it were all absorbing and all important. Walter Carew meanwhile was sitting all eyes and all ears.

"What can that snob have to talk to her about? Did not Lorraine tell him everything? What could it be?" was his thought.

"Those papers," went on Christopher, presently.

"Were rather rubbish, I fear," said Lorraine, blushing scarlet.

"No, not at all! not that! but not quite suited; not quite the style of thing."

"Ah, so we thought, or at least, feared."

"You said—ahem!—your friend wished to try a story!"

Here Lorraine's blushes became deeper.

"Yes—but I am not sure that the story is going on very favourably. It—in short—in fact, Mr. Vernon, I know she has not touched it for three days."

"What, have you been revelling in the agonies of composition, Lady Lorraine?" asked Carew.

"Not I!" said Lorraine; "but I have a little friend, to whom Mr. Vernon has been *so* kind."

Here Carew slightly pushed his chair away.

"Ah, Mr. Vernon," Lorraine went on, "I have never seen you to thank you properly. Mary and I go tearing about to our balls and things, and there is no time left, but if you knew how kind I think it, and if you knew how I wish I could thank you somehow—"

"Oh, it's nothing, Lady Lorraine!" But his face beamed with pleasure, and his

eyes looking into hers, seemed to wish to tell a tale of their own.

Lady Lorraine blushed as she met them.

"I wish I could see your friend," Vernon went on; "there are many little hints I could give her."

"Oh, tell me," said Lorraine, eagerly; "it is just the same thing."

"Not at all, begging your pardon."

"I believe she does not exist," said Carew, quickly.

Lorraine's modesty was nothing new to him.

"Very much obliged for your good opinion, Mr. Carew, but don't you know I cannot write a word? However, I have become so identified with her, I have read over her things, and talked them over, and made suggestions, and copied them out, till at times I almost forget whose they are,

and am tempted to imagine they are my children."

Then Lorraine got up and pretended to look out of the window, and Christopher Vernon went to her, and there, as he explained to Carew, proceeded "to talk business," lengthening out the "business" as much as he could, thinking thereby to annoy his fancied rival.

"I wonder why Mary does not come in," said Lorraine to Walter Carew, when Christopher Vernon had gone.

Carew slightly opened his eyes with astonishment, but the fact was that it was the first time Lorraine had actually been alone with him since trouble had menaced their friendship, and she was distrusting herself sadly to-day.

"You do not generally want Mary when I come," said he, gently.

She came and sat down opposite to him,

and looked into his face, half helplessly and half expectant.

“Have you any better news for me?” asked she, when he did not speak.

“No! it is all uncertainty, misery, and suspense. I think it will be foreign service in some line regiment, probably, but I care not much what or where or when—”

Lorraine’s lip trembled, and she was silent.

“It will all—must all—be hateful and horrible at first. By-and-by I may calm down, when the going and the parting are over; but it will be difficult. Why was I not sent years ago, instead of being spoilt, and ruined, and saddled with an accumulation of debt and incapability? It is not a fair start. If I had gone there first, I might be coming home now on exchange and for promotion, instead of going down to the bottom of a lower hill than I was ever

on. Are you sorry for me, Lorraine?" and he took her hand gently.

She had been looking down all this time. Now she raised her eyes to his face, and he saw they were full of tears.

Crying for him! At first he could not speak.

Then he tried to go on talking again, as though he had not noticed it.

"And the life will be horrid: no one to speak to, no friends, no fun, no pursuits, no interests, only some letters sometimes, Lorraine. I shall look for yours. You will write?"

And then Lorraine thought she was brave, and could speak to him, so she tried to gather her voice together, and her lips tried to frame the words,

"Yes—always."

But the voice was choked with sobs, and the lips trembled so, she had to give up

altogether, and snatching her hand away from his, she gave herself up to her wild grief, and burying her face—burning with shame and the horror of it all, and of crying before him—in her hands, with the tears trickling through her fingers, she sobbed and sobbed, more like a child in some vehement grief, than like the stately young woman Lorraine Tremeneere was usually considered.

Confusedly it all rose up before her ; the tell-tale story that had opened her eyes ; her friend, so schooled by her into friendship, too well schooled she thought ever to love her now, the friendship itself, now by her foolish mad tears being scattered away to the four winds of heaven ; and her own dreary blank future, henceforth to be alone, because she had not known when she had loved, and now she had loved and lost.

"Lorraine, my darling!" came a voice, gentle and grave, through it all.

And though she could not look up, and meet his reproachful gaze—she was sure it must be reproachful for her deplorable weakness—yet, yet the sobs were somewhat soothed, and she seemed a little calmer.

This was the first time she had failed in all those years of close friendship. "Surely he will forgive me my first fault?" she whispered to herself, still hiding her burning face.

And then she felt his hand on her head, heard him murmuring something about her pretty hair, heard him trying to soothe her, and then heard him gravely telling her, as some one with authority, to look at him once more.

But she could not do that. He must tear down those concealing hands, he must

stoop low indeed ere those downcast eyes would meet his.

"Smile, Lorraine ; don't look like that, child. Will you listen to me, dear ?"

She was meek enough, quiet enough now to listen to anything.

"Now, since all this has come upon me, since I have had to think of our parting, since our long friendship has been brought home very near to me, since your kindness, your goodness, your angel goodness !—oh ! Lorraine, I can't go on—but you know all I would say——"

No, she didn't ; but since he was faltering, she began to feel stronger now.

She dared to look at him, and as their eyes met, the truth flashed out on both, and the next moment she was folded in his arms, and her proud little head was leaning on his shoulder.

"A poor sort of a lover, darling, I make.

When I was rich I said nothing, but now that I have nothing to offer you, here I am at your feet. Oh, child! whose fault is it? What a long dreary mistake we have made! Is it too late? Oh, surely not! dear, loving, generous Lorraine. If you love me really, if it is indeed pain to part from me, oh! why will you not come? We will be happy, dear, though so poor. Life shall be one long holiday, and we will laugh at the world and its follies, its ambitions and its cares; and work will all seem play, for I shall be working for you."

Such and such words he spoke in his madness, and Lorraine, listening, drank them in,—dreamed over again the tale she had written, saw her happiness within her reach, and half stretched out her hand to take it.

The face was half upturned, the eyes with the love-light gleaming in them, the

caressing little hands were seeking his, and the mouth was ready to frame the soft word, when a thought struck her, and the fair head was lowered again. Her whole figure was motionless, and strength and life seemed alike gone out of her. .

Thus, dumb, they stood.

"It may not be," suddenly she said, in a moment more, gently freeing herself from his embrace; "it may not be."

He started from her.

"You do not love me, Lorraine?"

"Yes, dear, I do." How lovely she looked, standing there in her pretty soft dress, and with her little feminine ornaments and coquettish apparel; how essentially womanly and lovable she was, gently contradicting him, and mournfully rejecting what her whole soul wanted to take.

"Listen to me! I love you too much to marry you. I will not be a drag upon you.

I should never forgive myself, never ! You are poor, and I have not money enough to make you rich. If I had, dear. . . . But though I am my father's daughter, my money, you know, is not much,—not enough for that. You are poor, but you can work for yourself. I should only tie your hands, and weigh you down. Fancy dragging a poor useless suffering wife about with you. No ! I love you too much to do it."

And Lady Lorraine looked herself, and looked truth, and self-denial, and magnanimity as she said it.

"I cannot let you go so."

"Yes, Walter, you will ; you must. You will never tell any one I love you, though it is true ; and I will live my little life out somehow by myself, and I will watch over you always, and do anything I can for you always ; and you will forget this afternoon

and all its folly, and we will go on just as before."

"Impossible, Lorraine; we cannot go on just as before."

"Nonsense, Walter, we can and we will."

"We can if you don't really love me, perhaps. I might——"

"You doubt it?" And she went to him, and took his face in her hands. "Look, Walter, I love you . . . so much! I could die for you, or live for you, or do anything for you. I love you too much to hinder your life, or do anything but bless it, and try and help it. You would not have me to do sacrilege to my love and to let it be your curse? I am going to kiss you, once and for always."

Then she kissed him.


"And now, Walter, you know how I love you, and so I always shall, whatever I do; but no one else will ever know. I shall

never tell you again by word or look, I trust. Henceforth, dear, I am always only just as before, your friend Lorraine, only,"—and here her voice faltered,—“if ever you want anything at any time, trust me always.”

But the tears were coming again, and Lorraine fled fast away to solitude, where she could cry her heart out in peace.

Carew never quite knew how he found his hat, and made his way through the servants out of the house that afternoon.

## CHAPTER VIII.

HE novel was laid aside, and Lorraine strove to drown thought and feeling in a constant round of excitement. The days were all too long for her, and yet every moment was occupied. Balls, parties, pic-nics, luncheons, teas, plays, operas, concerts, nothing came amiss ; never had she seemed so gay, never had she seemed to love life and whatever it had to offer her, so much ; never had she been so popular, and never had she been so miserable. And after it all she would come home, and at length,

alone, ball-dress and jewels flung aside, would indulge freely in her restlessness and discontent, and sob her heart out on her pillow. In vain, weary as she was, might she seek for sleep; without a book, or some effort to exhaust her too active mind, it would not come. Carew had met her twice at balls, but she would not dance with him; and as he watched her merrily talking to everyone else, dancing away the whole night long, he began to wonder if that scene in Grosvenor Square were in truth a reality, or whether he had not dreamed it all. He little knew the effort her indifference cost her, or how cruel she thought it of him to stand there and watch her so narrowly,—he, so thoroughly at his ease, she *en évidence* and in torture. But she could not go on thus for ever: her spirit sought a refuge from its misery, and like the dove from the ark, it fluttered

about anxiously for somewhere to rest, but no place could it find. The waters were out round poor Lorraine, indeed, and her fluttering wings only got more hopelessly wounded and broken in her struggles.

How many twigs and branches did she not try to perch upon! but, alas! they broke with her weight, and disappointed her in their seeming strength. How many flowers did she not stoop to pluck, but they withered as she gathered them, and their colours faded as she held them near her eyes. The blossoms fell off the trees as she gently, in all hope and anxious yearning, lowered the branches within her reach. The fruit, so ripe, so beautiful when swinging on high in the air, or resting in some golden sunlit niche of the bright red wall, turned to dust and nausea as it touched her longing lips.

Poor Lady Lorraine! she sought so

desperately, so anxiously, so angrily—she strove so manfully; she almost deserved to succeed, just for the very struggle's sake.

“There must be something really satisfying somewhere,” she would say, wearily, as she turned away disappointed from something on which her hopes had been set, and which had crumbled in her grasp.

When the world and its pomps and vanities had somewhat disgusted her, when she found she could not hold out thus much longer, that the “semblance of things” must fade, and that there she could have no “abiding place,” for the foundation on which she stood was frail in the extreme, then she turned to religion. She had a pious cousin, and Lorraine remembered how in years gone by Margaret Berkeley would look at her earnestly, and say,—

“Ah, Lorraine! if you knew, if you felt as I do, if you knew what it is to have my

peace and my rest, you would give up all that" (pointing contemptuously to Lorraine, standing in the pride of her youth and beauty, and in the pride of her new dress, made in the latest fashion, with all its decorations), "and would come with me now."

Margaret Berkeley was then going off to help distribute dinner to some hundred or more little children belonging to some ragged school at the East End, and as Lorraine saw her quiet face, lit up with the calm light of self-reliance and self-assertion, as she saw her start off down the street in her quiet dress, with its very quiet cut, Lorraine had said to herself,

"There must be something in it."

Now the thought came back to her, as a straw to a drowning man—

"Perhaps there is something in it!"

If the thought occurred to her that now Margaret Berkeley would be a trifle more

self-reliant, more self-asserting, more calm, and her dress more antique in its cut,—if the idea of the shade of Margaret Berkeley rising in her eager triumph, in all the dread paraphernalia of old maidenhood, did stagger Lorraine for a moment, she put it by with a quiet smile.

“Triumphant of course she will be,” thought Lorraine. “She will think she has worked a miracle, that I am a convert, that the seed that fell on the way-side is bearing fruit a hundredfold ; triumphant, of course ! a triumph to be my pioneer among human miseries.”

And then Lorraine’s fair face became clouded, as she fell to musing how gladiatorial we are still in our tastes, and how we strive to alleviate our own woes by the spectacle of the miseries of others, seldom thinking of them till we ourselves are stung by the sharp pricks of suffering.

“But if we can alleviate ours by helping others, not merely looking, then, surely” . . . and Lorraine got up as she spoke, and walked across the room to the window, and stood there looking out, but not seeing much, while a hundred resolutions formed themselves in her busy brain. The rays of the western sun fell on her golden hair, and seemed to tell that sight might come to her out of the darkness yet.

There was a softer feeling in her heart as she turned back into the room again. She thought she would begin with Mary, to whom she feared she had been sharp and thoughtless; and then Walter Carew’s face rose before her, and it flashed upon her that he must have thought her heartless and indifferent, because he could not tell her innermost feelings, or know that she was suffering intensely.

So the next time he met her she was

very soft and gentle and sympathising. If she was a shade silent it was only that she was listening to him, and he was content if her eyes spoke to him sometimes. If she did not do it quite for nothing, if it cost her more than he knew, well, she would pay it. Men are so different, and do not understand, and she must do her utmost for his happiness, now that they had so little time together.

"I want you to let me come with you sometimes, Margaret," Lorraine was saying; "I want to know more of your mysterious work, and see more of your life. May I?"

There was a pleading weariness in Lorraine's soft voice, and Margaret Berkeley looked at her sharply as she said it.

It was a curious little room where they were sitting,—Miss Berkeley's sanctum. I am not sure that it was quite pretty, but it was very chaste. The walls were of a stone-

colour distemper ; prints—all good, and all of good subjects—hung on them. This was cold. There was a piano in one corner, with a green-silk front, and “ Ancient and Modern Hymn-books ” reposing on the top. There was a stern neatness about the writing-table, about its dark-coloured wood and its business-like-looking papers arranged neatly on it ; reports surely, nearly all, of idiotic asylums, and homes, and institutions and refuges, and schools, and so on. (This, to judge by the kind of cheap paper they were printed on, and their general outer man, for penetration into the inner recesses of Miss Berkeley’s soul is not invited, and they might all be love-letters, for all the world can know about it.) The arm-chair looked uncompromising, and held out its arms with a kind of *noli me tangere* air, as though its embrace were only to be sought in a case of the utmost

and most urgent need. It had an anti-macassar carefully pinned on its back, as though to shield it from the injuries of contaminating influence, and to enable quickly the soils and stains left by the heads of heretical and unorthodox visitors to be washed away and eradicated, that the arm-chair might again be duly arrayed in its shining robe of virgin purity and whiteness. There was a straight-backed sofa placed against the wall, and on it was a cushion, also hard, with four hard corners sticking up, and asserting themselves hideously, like some angular old maids who seem to assert themselves all over. Miss Berkeley was sitting on the sofa. The writing-table was before her, and the charitable superintending pen was in her hand.

Miss Berkeley did not live alone; far be it from her. She lives with her brother, "a gentle, unassuming, busy gentleman."

Their little house is in Mayfair. He is much thought of and much liked. Miss Berkeley also is much thought of.

Miss Berkeley is of a tall and commanding presence. Her face is pale, and not pretty. Her features are imposing, her eyes are bright, perhaps with enthusiasm, and her brow is striking, perhaps with concentrated power, perhaps with anything else. Her hair is dark, her hands are white, her waist is small, her feet are "nothing particular," her dress is economical, and rather useful than ornamental, and her manner is apt to be sharp, English and uncompromising. She was sitting on her hard, straight-backed sofa, with her faithful pen in her hand, when Lorraine's pleading, "May I?" struck upon her ear, and she lifted her eagle glance from the paper for a moment, and rested it on her cousin's face.

"What do you mean, Lorraine?" asked

she. "Work such as mine is not to be trifled with. You cannot take it up for a day, for the sake of change, and then put it down again. You cannot make a spectacle, an amusement of us and it, and then bid us good-bye. I can be no party to such a thing."

"I do not mean that," said Lorraine, softly; "I should like to see, that I might do something, that I might be useful to somebody."

She said it wearily, as though there was no strength in her for speech or for contention; and in truth there was very little just then. She spoke as so many love-lorn girls do (they are all alike), who have wrecked their life, they think, on the rocks they have drifted against, and are overburdened with its weight on their shoulders; but if they may not lay it down just yet, they would at all events like to do some-

thing with it, and perhaps help other stranded mariners, or avert similar ruin from others.

This is the first stage towards convalescence.

Again the eagle glance met Lorraine's, and she bore it without flinching. Then Margaret Berkeley looked on to her paper again musing, and the confidential quill drew pictures of imaginary heroic ragged urchins in the progressive stages of pauperism, cleanliness, clothing, and mental rectitude meanwhile.

Margaret Berkeley was touched.

But she did not speak ; she was musing deeply. The ragged heroes increased and flourished, but the silence was oppressive. Lorraine began to wriggle about uncomfortably in the uncompromising chair ; she began to think she had made a false move, and she began to feel an awe for "old

Margaret," as Lady Mary and herself had irreverently styled her, to which till then she had been a stranger.

Suddenly an idea visited the apartment.

Margaret Berkeley seized an ominously blue paper from the beak of a solemn bronze owl perched on a bronze pedestal on the table, and said,

"Will you come here with me and Miss Tubbs?"

## CHAPTER IX.



THREE girls riding in the "Row;" Katie and Maude Dalrymple on either side, and Lorraine in the midst. A perfect friendship existed between these three. First came Maude, she was the eldest, and had been out the longest, and the others looked up to her. Brilliant colouring, fair hair, yet rather brown than blonde, large expressive melting eyes, eyelashes which were always being lowered, and concealing effectually with their thick curtains the eyes beneath, and eyebrows slightly arched, which gave a

somewhat piquant and naïve expression to the face otherwise sweet and gentle. Katie, more childish, more full of fun and frolic, ever ready with some jest or laughing remark, more of a blonde than Maude, but not so brilliant or so fair, but with more character in her face, and more intelligence and shrewdness in her eyes than her sister; gentle, too, with a slight lithe figure, which twisted and turned with her talk, but quicker of perception, and more likely to give a repartee in words than to content herself like Maude with a gentle smile and a sympathising look. Lorraine we know. One does not say of her, perhaps, more than of the others, "She is some one," but one says, "She is something." Character in every line of her face, goodness and strength and courage in every inch of her. Her *crêpe* hair shone in the morning sun, and its bright soft fluff made a light round her head.

There is a soft happy expression on her face this morning, and her eyes have a calm and gentle look in them as they rest on the laughing Katie by her side.

"Maude was saying there was such a dreadful man at the ball last night, didn't you, Maude?" Katie said; "he would go on dancing, never stopped at all, and when she said she was tired, he only smiled idiotically, and said she must dance that off."

The others laughed.

"What is the joke?" asked Charley Dalrymple, as he joined them.

"Nothing for profane ears, considering it is at the expense of a friend of yours."

They had a merry ride that morning; their little jokes amused them intensely.

"Who is that fright?"

"Look at that female monstrosity."

"Here is a horror coming!"

"I shall cut him!"

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"Did he see me?"

"Why doesn't he come?"

And he, having come, after a few minutes,  
in *sotto voce*,

"Why doesn't he go?"

Thus chattering, till some inconsiderate  
newsmonger came up with,

"Have you heard about poor Walter  
Carew?"

Maude and Katie of course had not, and  
Lorraine looked as if she hadn't.

Charley Dalrymple watched her face as  
he heard the tale being told, but she never  
flinched or turned colour, only seemed  
rather indifferent and silent; but then, per-  
haps, she was so much taken up just then  
in recognising some pedestrian friends, that  
she might not have heard. He brought  
his horse quite close to hers.

"You probably know about poor Walter.  
You will miss him much."

There was just a trace of bitterness in his tone.

Lorraine looked down and felt the hot blushes burning her cheek. She had schooled herself to hear it; she knew it must be talked of, but how could *she* speak of it?

She could not answer.

"Or perhaps you do not know," persisted Dalrymple.

He was watching her narrowly, and Lorraine knew a good deal depended on her answer for him.

"I will not deceive him at least," she thought rapidly to herself. "Yes, I know all about it," she answered, bravely looking him in the face. "I *shall* miss him much, of course. He is the best friend I have in the world," she added, very heartily.

"And so he is mine," said Dalrymple, but not quite so heartily.

They rode back to Curzon Street altogether, for Lorraine had promised to have luncheon with them. What a glorious morning it was! How brilliant and happy and smiling everything seemed! How the harness of the carriage horses they met sparkled in the sun! How peaceful the coloured blinds drawn over the drawing-room windows of the houses looked! how pure the calm hue of the cloudless sky! and there curling up into it went the smoke, seemingly far away, far above the town, as men's thoughts and aspirations soar away—curling, curling, slowly up, only some never do get really away, but are borne down to grovel and be crushed together in the narrow streets, because there is nothing high or good or pure enough in them to lift them on high.

Some such thoughts was in Lorraine's brain as she watched the groom lead Water

King away. Turning quickly to follow the others, she was struck by the expressions on the servants' faces.

"What is it? Some calamity?" she whispered to herself.

She saw the doubting hesitating footmen; she knew they had something to communicate they dared not tell. Her first thought was for Lady Chester, and she was on the point of asking, when something withheld her.

Maude, too thoughtless, too inexperienced to notice any such thing, was still chattering away.

Dalrymple caught Lorraine's eye, and found the strange expression he had seen on the servants' faces reflected there.

"What is it, Cooper?" he half gasped, under his breath to the old butler.

"A—a—luncheon's ready, sir," stam-

mered the old man, as he backed to the drawing-room door, and opened it.

The girls passed in, but Lorraine lingered.

"Tell me, Cooper—it may be best."

Charley Dalrymple was pale now.

"I know not how to tell your ladyship, but you will tell him, perhaps, better than any one else," pointing to Dalrymple. "It is Lord Chester. Dead." He almost hissed the last word in a hoarse whisper in her ear.

She was shocked, almost stunned she would have been by the news, if poor Charley Dalrymple had not been there. Her eyes questioned the servant's truth.

"Heart!" he added, as if to verify his words.

She turned blindly to poor Charley ; she went up to him. Oh, yes, he had heard ! But he stood like marble, like one

without sense or feeling. How he had loved, trusted, worshipped that father ; and now ! He stood there, and moved not, spoke not, only looked white like some ghost, and his poor eyes seemed starting out of his head in their vacant stare.

" Mr. Dalrymple," said Lorraine, and she gently touched his sleeve. He heard her not.

" Listen to me," she went on ; but he was not listening. Then she put her hand on his shoulder ; and finally her own grief overcame her, and she sobbed uncontrollably.

" Charley, dear Charley, it is too dreadful ; do say something."

How many years had they not known each other ; and how well, and how thoroughly. Yes ; surely in such a moment she was right to follow the first impulse, and call him what she liked.

Then she sat down on the stairs, and

burying her face in her handkerchief, moaned out her misery for the loss of her dear kind friend.

Perhaps the sight of her grief brought Charley Dalrymple to himself sooner than anything else could have done. He felt he must console her ; he felt he must be strong for her dear sake, and what gives strength so much as the knowledge one must have it ?

“ Lorraine ! ” whispered he, huskily.

She looked up at him wearily, hopelessly, as though she were utterly stricken, but still she would hear what he had to say.

“ What shall we do ? ” he asked.

They were very near to each other in that moment. She touched his hand gently, by way of sympathy, and the tears chased each other down her cheek.

“ Don’t cry, Lorraine, ” said he.

It was like one child comforting another.

Presently she got up, and would have moved forward, but Maude's merry voice within struck on her ear, and she looked up in his face as she said below her breath,

"We must tell the others."

Their eyes met, and they stood there like two guilty things.

"I will," Lorraine added, in a moment. "Do you go to Lady Chester; she must want you sadly."

"Will you follow me?"

"If you call me I will come. Go now. I must think a minute before I go in there," and she pointed to the room whence issued above the clattering of plates and glasses, the noise of merry children and thoughtless girls talking.

As she stood there staring out at the bright glaring street through the window, how cruel all the brightness seemed, how the world and life seemed altered all in a

moment, how strange the contrast since she had jumped off Water King in all the impetuosity of youth, disdaining Charley's aiding hand ; and now ! It seemed almost wrong of the sun to go on shining so, when such a heavy cloud of misery was obscuring their lives.

Charley went slowly up. As he caught sight of her awe-struck face from the turn of the staircase, as he felt how near their common grief had brought them, a ray of light streamed to him through all his misery, and he whispered to himself, "She is one of us already."

## CHAPTER X.



WHO likes being put on a shelf?  
Not Christopher Vernon! He,  
the busy, energetic, triumphant  
rising man, who never knew what it was to  
stop till he had reached his journey's end;  
he, to be suddenly brought to a standstill,  
and left! Was it much wonder if he chafed  
and fretted, and used some bad language  
about women's inconsistency? Had he  
not sacrificed time, ingenuity, and per-  
formed many simple ruses to further femi-  
nine effort, and to encourage feminine in-  
dustry? and now were efforts and industry

to be no longer forthcoming? Was it all to be in vain? Not only for days, but for weeks, had he heard nothing of Lorraine, of Lorraine's friend, or of Lorraine's friend's novel. Under ordinary circumstances he might, perhaps, not have regretted the friend or the friend's novel, but these were not ordinary circumstances. He had himself made some outlay of time and money in the scheme, and were these to be thrown away? Not only this; he had done it for a reason, and was there to be no result? In truth he was in no amiable temper, as he shut his house door after him, preparatory to walking to his mother's, where he had promised to spend the evening.

Mrs. Vernon had established herself in London, ostensibly to be near her son; really also, perhaps, to escape from the dullness and narrow gossiping life one is almost forced to lead in a small French town. She

had engaged some very pretty rooms in Half Moon Street, and already had gathered around her a small society, principally men, and principally Christopher's friends, it is true, but still many wishes had been expressed for introductions to her, and the number of her allies was steadily on the increase. Not only her beauty but her tact, her graceful though dignified welcome, her conversation (for she had read during all those years with a purpose), her wit, and a nameless air of confidence, yet of mystery and reserve about her, gave a charm at once indescribable and irresistible.

Her little réunions in the evening came about quite by chance. Society, expression, conversation, field for conquest, had become a necessity for Mrs. Vernon, and as she had scarcely chance for the exercise of these in the "great world," she made them for herself at home.

A few clever women frequented her little drawing-room. It was understood that any one among her friends might drop in after nine o'clock for their coffee, and she was never alone now. The women at first, perhaps, were more clever and witty than respectable, but by degrees respectability also was considered, and brilliancy even was discarded without regret, quality being more valuable than quantity.

To give the impression that Mrs. Vernon had achieved this position without the least effort on her part, would be false; but then the effort was to her meat and drink and life. The ascent up the ladder was certainly somewhat steep, but she took pleasure in the steepness and the difficulty; as a war-horse dilates his nostrils, sniffs the air and paws the ground on the eve of battle, so the sight of an adversary only made her rise efficient to the occasion, tighten her

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armour around her, and smile a proud smile of content as she measured strength with strength. Such warfare is natural to a woman; her arms are invisible, unacknowledged, and the pleasure of using them is innate in feminine nature. Side looks are often side threats, smiles are swords, principles are ambition, party spirit is one step, and religion is another. Accomplishments are means to an end, and one end is often only the way to another. Indulgence to foibles is the means of asking for room for faults of one's own; and a seeming regard for prejudice is to gloss over sins against a higher code. Intellect is lauded and worshipped often for its absence, and small sins are permitted for its sake. Society is openly laughed at, when no footing in it can be found; a reason, far from the truth, is given to ensure subserviency, when such service may be rendered.

One very warm corner was still left in Mrs. Vernon's heart, and that was occupied by Christopher. Very different from the smile with which she greeted her usual guests, very real, indeed, was that with which she turned to him on his entrance, from the old Baron de Léarmont and Mrs. Vanderleck.

"Ah! Chrissy,—I was beginning to think you were not coming to me!"

"Am I so late, mother? The fact was——"

"Madame must not be too *exigeante* to such a young lion, as monsieur her son here," said the old Frenchman.

"Ah! he spoils me, monsieur! that is what it is! You do not know how good he is!"

"But I can fancy it, my dear Mr. Vernon," put in Mrs. Vanderleck. "I look upon your son with a reverence almost

amounting to awe. In no relation of life, does it seem to me, does he fail. As a husband, certainly, he has not been tested, but as son, friend, adviser, author, as a member of society—for all that society needs—he seems to me perfect.”

“Did I not make allowances for old acquaintance’ sake, madam, and for a too partial opinion, my perfection might be seriously endangered to-night.”

“For all that society needs, you say, Mrs. Vanderleck! *What* does society need?”

“I will tell you, mother,” put in Christopher, rather bitterly. “It needs obedience, servility, a ready tongue for saying nothings, a reverence for its absurd practices, and a concurrence in all its hateful prejudices. You must laugh with it at goodness, and simplicity, and purity, and honour; at benevolence, at grandeur of

soul, at a noble love, or a great ambition, worthy of the name. You must share in its heartlessness, in its selfishness, in its pusillanimity, in its meannesses. That is what it needs, mother."

"Nay, Mr. Vernon!" said Mrs. Vanderleck, "evil abounds, I do not doubt," and Mrs. Vanderleck cast down her eyes, as though, at all events, it did not come near her, and were far from her ken (by the way, she was young and pretty, a widow of a year or two's standing, and dressed in fashionable black), "but you are unduly severe. Heartlessness there is, but much kindness, too. You take in the whole with one general condemnatory glance; but I think of individuals, who think of pleasing others as well as taking their own pleasure,—who may have small ambitions, but, at all events, they are harmless; who may have prejudices, because they *must*;

but who, on the whole, are content with life as they find it, smile again gratefully as they are smiled upon, and try, as far as may be in their power, to return good for good, and to avert evil from coming near them or theirs."

"That is not society," said Christopher. "You are thinking of a few good, easy-going people, who are going along at a comfortable jog-trot, and who are in no ways put out by the pace at which the world is rushing along, and who do not try at all to keep up with it. They are the few. But the bulk of society are people tearing along here, there, and everywhere—inwardly consumed by a raging fire of disappointment and ambition; running, in fact, an endless, or, at least, a life-long race, in the course of which friends are foes, and every one who does not help is a hindrance. Ambition is the horse; how

often he breaks down ere he reaches the winning-post ! And what is won ? What word is small enough to be true ? Fame is too great ; Pleasure would be falsehood ; Popularity, perhaps, is nearest, for it is unstable as the wind, and its phases may aptly be likened to the phases of such a position."

The entrance of some new arrivals diverted Mr. Vernon's and the Baron's attention at that moment, and Christopher sat down on the sofa by Mrs. Vanderleck to continue the conversation.

"Prejudices, Mrs. Vanderleck," said a little man, with a red face, and red hands, coming up behind them. "You said we *must* have prejudices ! Oh ! Mrs. Vanderleck !"

He was Mr. Harrington, great in the House for making men laugh. He liked to try his hand at it with ladies also.

"So we must!" said Mrs. Vanderleck.

"A prejudice is a small word for a strong feeling against a great wrong."

"But is it a great wrong?" burst in Christopher.

"Often wrong would be more rife, and wrong would be greater and graver, if Prejudice, with a gentle and firm hand, did not rein it in."

"I look upon Prejudice as another word for uncharitableness, illiberality, ignorance, superstition, inconsistency, and often wickedness!"

"How wickedness?"

"It chokes modest worth, it is deaf to genius and merit. It is blind to effort and expression, and damns with failure and a vacant stare because of some slight error in garb, manner, presentation, or because of grade of station; christens labour impertinence, makes poverty a sin, absence

of friends a crime, is jealous of attempts, ridicules endeavours, hates novelty, and, 'on principle,' does its best to deprive everything of existence which it has not previously sanctioned with its august and vague smile."

"Mon cher Henri," said a voice behind Christopher, "you must take me away from here. There is some little mistake. I must go. I will explain afterwards to you."

Christopher Vernon turned quickly, and saw an old man with gray hair, talking rapidly in an undertone to another. Very eager, almost tremulously eager, he seemed. The other had an incredulous smile on his face, and seemed nonchalant and indifferent enough.

"What do you mean? I think you are suffering from some delusion—hallucination?"

"No! no! I have seen her before. I used to know her—your Mrs. Vernon!"

"Well?"

"Well! We quarrelled!"

"No! no! she did not recognise you the least in the world!"

"Not — not recognise me? But—but she *must* have!"

"But she did not!"

"But take me away! Make an excuse!"

"But she was delighted to see you—delighted."

"Did she hear my name?"

"No! she hardly gave me time to say it!"

"Call me anything else, my dear fellow; whatever you like, if you have to call me anything to-night."

"Very well. But, I assure you, your

fears are groundless. Ah ! my dear Christopher," said he, stretching out his hands to him as Christopher turned his full face suddenly to them. " So you have come to help us talk to-night ?"

The speaker was one of Christopher Vernon's oldest friends, and one of his mother's firmest and staunchest allies, Monsieur de Crépigny by name.

" Let me introduce a very old friend of mine to you : he owns an unpronounceable name, having lately had a title conferred upon him by the Russian Government. Let me see ! shall I attempt to frame it with my unpractised lips ?"

There was a laughing movement of dissent, as the young man bowed to his mother's guest, and they fell into conversation.

They talked of France, and her woes ; they talked of the abuse of power, of the

folly and the result of pride ; they quarrelled over Bismarck.

Christopher indulged in flights of fancy for the future, and so entranced the old man by his talk, that, though he, too, was interested, he could not resist a smile of amusement as he watched, one by one, the little assembly fall off ; and, at length, no one was left in the room but his mother and himself, de Crépigny, and the stranger.

Mrs. Vernon had come up to them behind her son, and was leaning her hand fondly on his shoulder, listening to his words, and proudly approving.

On either side stood the guests.

Mrs. Vernon looked from one to the other : on her face, her thought found expression ; when she spoke, the enthusiasm of her eye, the confidence, yet suavity, of

her manner, gave a charm to her words, winning and irresistible.

How proud, how glorious she looked ! Was it much wonder if a silence fell on the stranger, if thought, argument, power, seemed denied to him, and he stood enthralled there, only listening and looking ? Was it much wonder if, when at length they parted, Mrs. Vernon darted just one look of triumph into his eyes, as she lightly touched his hand, and trusted she might see him again ?

"Is it the gown, or why, little mother, do you look so well to-night ?" asked Christopher, when they were alone.

"Foolish boy !" murmured she, as she stood beside him, her hand in his. She was silent enough now. She stood there, calm and silent, looking down into the dying embers in the fireplace, apparently lost in thought.

“Christopher,” said she, suddenly, “will you not come for a holiday somewhere? You want rest,—let us go somewhere for a change.”

He was surprised, for she usually loved London so much.

“Ah! I suppose you will not come!” she added, impatiently. “Lady Lorraine will not let you come.”

And she walked away from him.

He stood his ground.

“My work, you mean, mother,” he said, calmly.

“No! I mean what I say! Idle, wicked flirt; she is ruining your life, all for her own silly vanity. She cares not for you, my boy. I know the signs. I have seen her speak to you when you knew not I was by. I care not for her face either—it is beautiful and clever, but it is hard and selfish, and worldly.”

"Why this sudden anger against Lady Lorraine Tremeneere, mother?"

"Because I cannot stand it. I love you and she does not. You are my child, my hope, my pride, my love! I cannot stand by and see her calmly, with her little white fingers, carelessly building up your ruin. Women can understand each other. We smile while we smite; we smile when we are ourselves stricken."

"But if I am stricken, you see, mother, it does me no harm. I can talk about it calmly enough. The wound does me good rather; it is a sweet memory, a pleasant pain. I would not part from it for worlds. If there is a hope, it is my strength, my life! Leave me my hope, mother! it is all I ask, and let us be happy together!"

Long stayed the mother and son talking together. Sitting there, the candles

burned low, and the flickering flame, leaping up now and again, made ghastly shadows in the little room. The fire burned with a dull red light, and the silence that fell on the room in the pauses of their desultory talk was almost death-like in its intensity.

So die our hopes, so falls darkness on our lives, when one act of the piece has been played out, and the *dénouement* we have longed for has come upon us all too suddenly.

"I am glad you talked to that gray-haired gentleman to-night, Christopher," said she, slowly.

"Who was he, mother?"

She paused ere she answered.

"It was one you have often heard of. It was one—— He used to call himself Monsieur de Chaumont—he——" And she slipped on to the ground, and buried


her face on Christopher's knee. "He is your father."

"Did I do it well?" she said afterwards, triumphantly. "Did he see how he was completely forgotten? how I, whom he ruined, deceived, wearied of, have won other friends, and a nobler and a better love?" seeking for her son's hand. "Did he see how others can take a pleasure in being with me, though he could not? Did he see how great, and good, and talented you are—you, whom he left unprotected, and who only had my frail arm to protect you? Do *you* see now how I can trample on my love? how I can afford to smile at the past—at my woe—at my pain? how I can bandy words with him, argue about kings, corn or candles, and own to no feeling but a slight thrill of triumph, as I see him worsted in the argument, and admiring us both in his defeat?—shed no tear over

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the miserable past, and only smile as I catch an entreaty in his eye for a gleam of pity from me? Ah! Christopher, my boy, do you, too, triumph so over your ill-fated love; rise above it, and laugh at it with me. Believe me, the pain it costs is nothing, for the triumph the victory brings us."

## CHAPTER XI.

“ILL you come here with me and Miss Tubbs?”

Lorraine had assented.

*Here* had been a meeting for feminine influence for the repression of feminine helplessness.

Miss Tubbs had been a female figure of a decidedly masculine form. She was—eager, ugly, and energetic. She spoke. Margaret Berkeley and Lorraine assented. Others spoke—Lady Lorraine was somewhat shocked, but she seemed to assent.

The propositions of the speakers were

startling, unprecedented, and somewhat impossible, but enthusiasm is apt to smother the practical, and reality must sometimes be sacrificed for the sake of an elegant period, or for the exhibition of courage and zeal.

Lorraine had eyed the company somewhat anxiously, hoping to find a gleam of sympathy, and a reflection of her own disgust, in some of the eyes around her. But the females mostly possessed spectacles, false fronts, thick veils, scanty petticoats, and stony hearts, while of the four men who were present, two were of the tenderest age, and were brimming over with enthusiasm for the new doctrines; the third was the chairman, and was gravity itself, though a malicious twinkle visible every now and then in the corner of his eye, sowed the seed of doubt in Lorraine's mind as to his orthodoxy; and the remain-

ing male aspirant to crush female helplessness, was a little fat, red-nosed, eagle-eyed man, who looked as though he were in the habit of picking up every little crumb he came across in life, of testing its origin, parentage, and value, and of adopting it for his own immediately if it seemed worth his while. A Dissenter to-day, an Anglican to-morrow—a lover of the Arts yesterday, he might be anything, from patron to pauper, the next time we meet him.

When Lorraine reached Grosvenor Square again, she sought in vain in the recesses of her mind for some small evidence of that peace and satisfaction which Margaret Berkeley had promised her. The shades of those terrible women haunted her, and, though she was alone, she could not hinder her hands from going up to her ears, to shut out the shrill words, jangling sounds, and hideous theories and

propositions she had heard propounded. Blushes even now covered her cheeks as she thought of them, and she softly whispered to herself she had made a mistake, as she entered her father's drawing-room, half-an-hour afterwards, in time to receive his guests for dinner.

Still she did not at once set about rectifying the mistake. That there was something in it she still firmly believed ; more of a something at least than she could find in society and its toils.

The cold gray eye of Miss Tubbs had rested on Lady Lorraine, as she sat opposite to her in the cab which bore them to the room, where so many hearts burning for female influence to be brought to bear on the society for the repression of female helplessness were assembled.

Lady Lorraine, with her rank, wealth, youth and beauty, was a subject not to be

despised, and as Miss Tubbs set herself to dazzle her victim with the pearls of eloquence she cast before her, about the "myriads of women in every rank and station of life, in every stage of helplessness," a gleam of intelligence passed from Margaret Berkeley's eagle orbs to her own dull powers of vision, and a half smile of satisfaction was permitted to each other by these women, by way of promise of mutual help and companionship in the attempt at victory.

Periodically invitations, cards of admission were fired at Lady Lorraine, her company and patronage solicited, and for a time, she, sincerely believing she was doing good, tore about to all kinds of impossible places, and suffered much.

To dinners, meetings, addresses, prayers, lectures, discourses, teas, gatherings, assemblies, and hundreds of horrible things be-

sides, this girl, eager for distraction and satisfaction, went. If she found neither, she began to think it was her own fault ; her own mind's fault for refusing to take interest, and only feeling disgust for what interested others so much, even to moving them to tears, and wrangling and rage and sorrow.

Christian work for Christian women was a favourite theme with Margaret Berkeley, and many a time was Lorraine carried off to scenes of woe and suffering, where she was indeed able sometimes to carry temporary aid, and to hope at least to do ultimate good. Even then she found herself restricted and crippled by prejudice and ignorance—by having to begin at the wrong end, by finding evils irremediable by long continuance, by want of heartiness and unselfishness in her co-operators. No

wonder she felt sick at heart sometimes, as the impossibility of doing much anywhere came sharply home to her !

It was a wonder she had not given up her feeble efforts long long ago. Her beauty was not improved by the life she was leading ; society scarcely saw her, and her father's displeasure increased daily thereat. Lady Mary laughed and sneered. Christopher Vernon hazarded advice, and got snubbed. Charley Dalrymple did not know much about it, but wondered at what he heard through his sisters, used to come to tea, and used to look a great deal, and try to say something.

Walter Carew had gone—really gone. He had ventured remonstrance when he said Good-bye, but Lorraine had burst into a flood of tears, so, feeling annoyed, he had opened his eyes, and said no more.

Poor little Lorraine! she was drifting away indeed, and she knew not where. Wildly she would look around her, "with her mind's eye," sometimes, and wonder where she was coming to, and see no friend or anchor anywhere; and then Charley Dalrymple would come in and sit down in an arm-chair, and stay as though he had a right to, and would be very quiet and kind, though not brilliant, and she began to like it.

Poor fellow! he has plenty of time on his hands just now! His home was desolate enough, and all the hearts there sad enough since the death of their loving head and friend.

No wonder he permitted himself the satisfaction of sitting there with Lorraine, talking over their mutual loss. He never understood entirely how much the

loss of another mutual friend had altered her, and made her so gentle and sad and subdued.

One day Lorraine was sitting, feeling rather forlorn, in Richmond Park, where Miss Tubbs had taken her to aid in distributing tea to sixty-five model female children, and tea being over, she was sitting there to rest, when she was aroused from her reverie by the voice of Miss Tubbs, approaching her tree with a new female friend. She was a tall fair lady, dressed with care, even with elegance, and her face, though not strictly beautiful, yet had a softness and an expression of intellect and soul about it, which won over Lorraine at once, and she turned with some empressement towards the new comer.

"Lady Lorraine," said Miss Tubbs, "may I present Miss Flersheim to you? I must myself see to the children; but if

you will join us presently, when you are rested, I shall be much obliged. Miss Flersheim missed the train we came by, and has only just arrived."

The stranger sat down by Lorraine, and after a few commonplace remarks about the beauty of the weather, and of the scenery, Lorraine plunging into *medias res*, said—

"You are not English, I think?"

"Oh no! I am a German!" she answered in very good English, however. "But I am very fond of travelling, and am especially fond of England. I came over to study and to learn and to see. I do not know when I shall go back. You like this kind of thing?" she asked sharply, half patronisingly of Lorraine, as she made a quick little gesture towards the children romping all over the place.

Lorraine felt herself blushing, as she

indulged in a little low laugh peculiar to herself, when she was in a difficulty.

"I don't know," she answered, as she leant back against the tree, placing herself more comfortably as she thought what she should say. "I like to see people happy, children especially."

"A—h!" said Miss Flersheim, drawing out a long breath.

"And you?" asked Lorraine.

"I? Oh! I like everything! I go everywhere! I see everything! I must. It is my duty, my profession. I want to know, to understand, I write, that is why—besides, I like the country air!"

"Country air! Yes! but you cannot write about this—what will you say?"

"Oh! I don't know! It may be a material some day. I must know how English children enjoy themselves."

"But these are model female English children," said Lorraine, maliciously.

"What are they?" asked Miss Flersheim, puzzled.

"Oh! I do not know!" said Lorraine.

"We must ask Miss Tubbs."

However, they both laughed.

And from that they dared to laugh on other subjects, and to talk gravely too on other subjects, and from Miss Tubbs, they got to other women, and from women's work to women's books, and women's life, and thence to man, and thence to nature, and so to God; and thus the hours flew by, and though Miss Tubbs might scowl at the idlers as she liked, it was not till the model female children were all in due array for the return to town, that the two girls jumped up, and when they parted at Waterloo, Lorraine to get into her carriage, Miss Flersheim to go alone in a hansom,

it was with many assurances of friendship, and many hopes for another meeting speedily.

It came soon. The indefatigable Miss Tubbs sent an invitation to both to meet her on board an emigrant ship, to bid farewell with her to fifty-five of England's youth bound for the new country.

"It will be a cheering sight," wrote she. "They all have nice new clothes provided them, and all have occupation for a year. They *must* rise there, here they cannot. There, who knows? (for many of them are remarkable children), not only may they rise to wealth, but to rule and to command."

The old lady dreamed well certainly while she was about it. Probably in every robust boy she saw a possible President.

However, Lorraine went, and as she was examining the ship, the berths, and the

food with her cousin and Miss Tubbs, Miss Flersheim arrived. Then they went to luncheon in the chief saloon. Miss Tubbs would only eat the emigrants' food, but all were not so zealous. The captain and the medical officer, and other officers were there at luncheon too, but they had never seen any one like Lorraine, and were struck into silence when she lifted her veil and quietly took off her gloves, and tried to carve the great coarse bit of beef which was on the table in front of her, and tried to eat whatever they gave her, and wondered how every one else managed to eat everything, fat and all, that they had on their plates, Miss Flersheim excepted. And the captain ordered some champagne in Lorraine's honour, and Miss Tubbs nudged Miss Berkeley in wonder at his generosity, and Miss Berkeley told her under her breath "not to notice it," and Miss Flersheim

signed to Lorraine she had better not drink it, and refused it herself, saying she never took it. But when Lorraine refused, the poor captain looked so disappointed, and there was such an uproar, that she was obliged to have some, and declared she liked it immensely, though it were at the imminent peril of immediate death.

And after luncheon, they went over the ship again, to see the boys' berths and the girls' berths, and to watch the men working. Great strong rough beings they were, such as Lorraine had never seen before, and to see the women washing the ship—great rough creatures—who looked as much astonished at Lorraine as she did at them, and to smile at Miss Tubbs seeking opportunity for a word in (or out of) season, till at last Lorraine was alone on the deck with Miss Flersheim, and they went and sat in a corner under their umbrellas, and in-

dulged their tongues and imaginations in fancy flights amid all the busy scene, amid the sunlight pouring down in molten gold on the rippling water, the bustling interfering Miss Tubbs, and such as she, the quiet captain giving his orders, the crying children, the partings, the regrets for the past, the hopes for the future ; the ships being laden with coal, the smoke, the noise, and the calm cloudless sky over all.

In another world sat Lorraine and her friend, oblivious to all going on around them, full only of hopes and dreams, of difficulties of their own creating. That hour clenched the friendship their former meeting had begun. Contrasts though they were, they seemed to suit each other perfectly. They talked of each other's lives, they dreamed and thought out loud—they told of each other's friends. Miss Flersheim was to come to Grosvenor Square,

Lorraine was to go to Miss Flersheim's little house.

Lorraine sat back and looked at the glittering water, and thought in her heart that she had found peace at last.

## CHAPTER XII.



SO disgusted were Lord Clieveden and Lady Mary Dalton at Lorraine's goings on, so incomprehensible and unreasonable did they seem, that they clutched at any straw to turn her attention to something new, and had recourse to many devices to win her back to society. But for a long time it was in vain. True, she had somewhat given up the meetings, and the pauper children, but she had only strayed into another path. Miss Flersheim was literary. Lorraine had ever had a hankering that way, and

now she took to it more than ever. Not only literary lions and literary society did they seek, but they really seemed to study. Reading at the British Museum was a daily pleasure ; books and pens and paper sprouted up everywhere around them. Lord Clieveden was in despair.

Just at this time Lorraine received a very pressing invitation to go to Carlingsford for awhile. Of course they were still in deep mourning, and could have no society, but the girls said they longed for Lorraine, and surely she would spare them a little of her time.

Lorraine never quite knew if it was a plot of her father's to get her away, or whether the invitation had been spontaneous. Her first impulse was to refuse. How was she to write and study and read down there ? How could she live without Miss Flersheim ? But her father and cousin pressed

her so much to go, made such a duty of it, gave her in fact no room to refuse, that she had to accept. It was the best thing that could have happened for her. Of course it was a very lazy, languid life, and of course she felt irritated sometimes, and mentally kicked against the pricks sorely. But what was the use? And just her very helplessness won her back to reason, and she soon got subdued, dispelled of herself her dreams of ambition, and became again like other people.

They were all so kind to her. Maude and Katie hovered about her, as though they could never have enough of her. Charley was ever at her feet, a willing slave, looking up into her great thoughtful eyes, as though he would fathom to their depth if he could, and as though he knew there was something in her soul which raised her immeasurably above him; and

Lady Chester herself, proving more of a mother than Lorraine had known for many a long day. No wonder so much love vanquished her! No wonder the wild dreams one by one vanished, and that by degrees she sat among them again "in her right mind." At times she sat abstracted and silent. Often Charley Dalrymple (or rather Lord Chester, now), had surprised her sitting alone in the garden or in the boat, with a book before her, but she was not reading, or thinking of it, and often he saw her eyes were full of tears, when she turned them towards him. He began to know she must be nursing some great and secret sorrow, and he began to respect her and love her the more. "All sorrow brings us very near to God," they say, and all sorrow brings us very near to each other. There is a sympathy in it which seems to lay bare hearts at once.

The picture Lorraine had drawn for herself of her life had been so different, no wonder she took some time to realise to herself its impossibility. Friends and society and affection she had put out of it and far from her. Work and religion and an intellectual life had been her dream. Now where were they ?

“ And yet I know I am fit for better things,” she would say, fretfully to herself, after a day on which she had been what she called absolutely lazy—when indeed she had done nothing but make others happy. And then she would wonder why if it were work so far below her capabilities, she was still so happy doing it ? and then she would whisper to herself if only Walter Carew had been there, and if he had been one for her to make happy, how life itself would have been all too short, and now failing

him, no other real happiness ever could be hers in this world.

But she was being cured though she knew it not.

The very fact of her being content with idleness, as she soon became, content to sit all by herself, not speaking or moving hardly thinking, as she gazed up at the blue sky, by the hour together, was a sign of cure.

Then there were fitful gleams of fun ; gleams when she was surprised at herself, but when she was so bewitching, that it was like the sunlight after an April shower ; the hearts of all around her rejoiced in her joy, and the light was reflected on every face. And the sight of the spread and diffusion of her joy encouraged it.

Were they not all sad and suffering just now, and had she not come to be merry if she could, and make them forget their

grief? What was hers beside theirs? Thus reasoning, she was stern to herself. Poor little Lorraine! did she try to tax herself beyond her strength?

They were very happy altogether at Carlingsford. They had very innocent gaiety, and very gentle merriment. Their jokes were of the quietest, and their amusements depended much on each other.

Sketching and rowing and reading and singing were the order of the day, and children there were there, to make fun and frolic, and to carry the grown folk out of themselves, when their gravity became serious.

Lorraine never sang now. She would smile at the others, and beg for their music, but her own voice was still. Standing at the window one Sunday night, listening to the girls singing with their brother, she looked almost unearthly in her white dress, with

her eyes gazing up at the stars. Lorraine never did anything for effect, but she had hit on an attitude that became her wonderfully.

The music ceased for a while, and then Charley's voice alone rose clear and strong above the hum of conversation.

Lorraine trembled as she listened, and turned away to hide her face, as she felt the tears gathering in her eyes.

"I am a poor love-sick puny fool," said she to herself, as she stepped out on the terrace in a rage.

Hardly outside, at least the sweeping train of her dress was still within the window, but outside enough to be alone.

"That was poor Walter's song," said Charley's voice presently in her ear.

She did not answer, and he, perceiving she was touched by something, thought his own voice had been the moving power, and

ventured to lay his hand on her arm lightly as he stood beside her.

"He sympathises with me," thought she, and let it stay.

"Lorraine, darling Lorraine!" whispered he.

She began to see his meaning now, and would have withdrawn her arm. But too late! he held it fast, and a torrent of words poured from her lover's lips.

"Let me go—let me go," said she, and tearing herself away, she entered the house and glided away upstairs.

But she could not sleep. Hour after hour struck on the old stable clock, and she only turned and tossed and grew more restless every moment. At last she got up. Four o'clock had struck. She looked out of her window over the park, stretching away through the valley; the sun just rising tipped the trees with a wondrous hue

of rosy light, and she looked at the little pink clouds, listened to the birds just beginning to wake up, looked at the dew on the grass, and the sleepy flowers, and—

“I must go out,” said she.

So, finding her oldest and shortest dress, which the dew could not spoil—hardly staying to arrange her hair—half an hour after out she went.

Now the garden-door was stiff and heavy, not what garden-doors should be, and Lorraine did not understand the bolts and bars at first, so that it is to be feared she did not steal out so quietly as maidens should at that hour of the morning. Certain it is, that the noise she made roused the sleeping Apollo overhead, and perplexed him sorely, as he seized his revolver and anathematized the extraordinary burglars who came at broad daylight. He was soon satisfied that it was no burglar, and

standing at his window to see who was the very early bird, was somewhat amused to see his lady-love issue forth with great gravity in her russet clothing, for all the world like another Enid, calmly walking down the gravel. She looked so pretty, slowly stepping along; so quaint, in her ugly dress, with her fair face—so strange, as she seemed calmly moralising to herself on the beauty around her—now stooping to pick a flower, now looking absently at the sunrise, now gazing over the park, now brushing with hasty feet the dew off the grass in some excursion to a flower-bed, and then looking back and laughing at the marks she had made.

Then she turned to contemplate the windows of the sleeping household, and Apollo nervously hid himself behind the curtain.

“I’ll go out too,” said he.

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He was decidedly slow not to have thought of it before.

But the garden alone did not nearly satisfy Lorraine that morning.

Out by the little wicket-gate, down the hill-side where the grass was longest, down to the little dell where the nut-trees grew thickest, and there, finding a felled tree, nearly hidden in the bushes and tall grass, she sat herself down and rested.

There, twisting a little bouquet of wild flowers together in her hands and singing a little song to herself, Lord Chester at last found her.

She rose, coloured crimson, and then turned pale when she saw him. Then she sat down again, looked at him almost angrily, and said nothing.

"You know why I have come, Lorraine," said he, standing before her.

"For nuts, I suppose," said she, in a minute.

"Nuts!" exclaimed he, with ineffable contempt.

"You did not know *I* was here!" she exclaimed with decision.

"I saw you come. You made such a row about it!"

All this was a bad beginning. It was neither sentimental nor to the point.

But presently they got on better. He left off making holes in the ground with his stick, and dared to look at her. She let him sit down beside her, and only interested herself now and then with the flowers.

He achieved a long speech, which he ended up with—

"Will you marry me, Lorraine?"

Her head had sunk down low on her breast, while he had been telling of his

love for her. Now that she had to answer, she raised it slowly. There was no smile upon her face ; it seemed grave and hopeless enough. Then she took hold of his walking-stick, with a kind of helpless child-like gesture, as though she must not touch him, but as though she wanted something to help her to be kind to him, because she knew her words must be unkind. Then she got up, and, leaning the point of his stick on the felled tree, stood over him as she spoke.

The dew was on her hair, and shone like diamonds there. Her face was even wet with the droppings from the boughs as she had passed hastily under them. They were like tears of joy the angels had shed on her.

"I cannot marry you, Charley. You don't know anything about it, and no more do I. It is all very extraordinary. If you

had asked me years ago—then—it would have been all right. Now I am altered. I thought I should have cared for you always, but I don't. I am very odd. I don't think I shall ever marry. I am going in for intellect and cleverness and books, you know. That is to be my life."

It was a miserable attempt at a smile, but she smiled in a way as she said it.

"Rubbish, child!" said he.

Strange! she liked him better for that hasty "Rubbish, child!" than for anything he had ever said in his life before.

"It is not rubbish," she said, quietly. "I cannot marry you. It would not be fair. I do not care for you enough."

Then she stood there, pulling her flowers to pieces, opposite to him, not speaking, like a fretful child who has done wrong.

"Then we will say no more about it," said he, jumping up.

He was partly annoyed, and partly a gleam of intelligence had come to him about her character. He had been rather too soon—that was all! She must want something very much indeed before she would stoop to take it. Oh, no! he certainly would not despair, but he would be proud and dignified with her now.

So they walked back together to the house, she quietly stepping beside him, silent, as though she felt she were misunderstood, but obstinate like a spoilt child, and knowing herself her answer had been a very womanly unreasonable one—a kind of “I think him so because I think him so.”


All the way she let him talk, and herself said next to nothing. Arrived at the door, she drew a pattern on the gravel with the point of her boot.

“You won’t say anything about this

morning, Charley, will you?" whispered she, shyly, looking up.

"As you wish!" said he, smiling to himself, as he looked down on her changing countenance.

### CHAPTER XIII.

ORRAINE and Miss Flersheim sitting in close confabulation in the tiny boudoir in Grosvenor Square. There was no one in the drawing-room with which it communicated, but still the door was shut fast. State secrets were certainly being discussed. They had not long returned from the British Museum, where they had shared a small table, had given some trouble by requiring books no one had ever heard of, had created observation by surrounding themselves with large tomes which they thought

looked learned, but it only looked feminine and frivolous, and had given rise to many a smile on many a time-worn and suffering masculine face, and many a query—"What will young women take to next?"

The evening before they had been to a Royal Institution lecture, and in the afternoon they had been at a meeting where Miss Flersheim had intended to speak, and had told the chairman so, but at the last minute her courage had failed her, and she had resisted all his entreaties and insinuations.

Now they were resting, and were busy in "intellectual effort." The "effort" was subsiding into gossip, the argument was gradually lowering itself to confidence. Art, science, knowledge, power, were, alas! being shunted as subjects for interchange of individual feeling and individual experience.

"Well!" said Miss Flersheim. "So you gave him the story all unfinished as it was!"

"Yes! at last I did! It had been buried down there deep, a long time. I myself had almost forgotten it, and how I wrote it, and so I let him have it. He seemed to think that nothing was coming. He seemed to be doubting me (it was but a fragment). I let him have it. I determined to forget myself in it, and vowed too always to keep my own secret."

"And what does he say?"

"I have never heard a word since. I suppose it is very bad and that he is disgusted."

"I wonder. I fancy if it is so true—if it came to you so naturally, as you say, it cannot be very bad."

They sat in silence for a moment. Sud-

denly the door opened, and a servant, offering Lorraine a card, said :

“The lady told me to ask you if you was disengaged for a moment, my lady.”

“Mrs. Vernon !” said Lorraine, slowly, taking the card between her fingers. “I do not know her. I never heard of her. But never mind ! show her upstairs.

“Mrs. Vernon !” said Miss Flersheim, excitedly. “Is it the same, I wonder !—one of the cleverest, most charming women in London. Oh ! Lady Lorraine ! what can she want, I wonder ? Some invitation perhaps for you—she delights in clever people. Do go, and do be very pleasant to her.”

“Oh ! please, follow me very soon !” said Lorraine ; “I doubt my own powers of fascination very much indeed.”

But she put on her prettiest smile, and

went into the drawing-room with her most charming greeting.

Mrs. Vernon was sitting on a sofa.

She rose as Lady Lorraine entered, and the two confronted each other for a moment in silence.

Lorraine, looking up at her, thought she had never seen any woman half so majestic, half so beautiful before. She had a vision of Cleopatra, and of her power, and almost forgot to talk, losing herself in the vision.

Mrs. Vernon, looking down on gentle, fair little Lady Lorraine, hated her for her beauty, hated her soft smile, hated the bright, open, honest glance of her beautiful eyes.

The more Lorraine sought to please, the more hateful she was.

"Mrs. Vernon, I think?" said Lorraine, gently smiling; "where will you sit?"

"Yes, Mrs. Vernon, Lady Lorraine

Tremenheere. You must pardon me for my visit, you must pardon me for introducing myself to you thus ; but there are some things in life, some circumstances, some feelings which do not admit of society's rules, care not for society's opinions, and are too powerful for custom's laws."

Lady Lorraine gravely bowed her head, and motioned Mrs. Vernon to a chair.

"I do not care to sit," said Mrs. Vernon, walking slowly to and fro, and measuring her words as she stepped. "You may sit, if you will. I only ask your attention for a few moments."

Lady Lorraine was beginning to lose her temper, so she did sit down.

"I have to speak to you, Lady Lorraine Tremeneheere, of my son."

Lorraine opened her eyes to their widest. Mrs. Vernon might have a dozen sons, for all she knew or cared about them.

"You know him well, I think?"

"I have not that pleasure, Mrs. Vernon. I don't know any Mr. Vernon. Oh, dear me, yes! by-the-by, I do! I wonder if that Mr. Vernon is your son?"

Mrs. Vernon stood opposite to her, looking at her.

"Has anything happened to him? What is it, Mrs. Vernon? I should be so sorry! Do you mean Mr. Christopher Vernon? Tell me why do you stand so?"

"Nothing," said the angry mother, half-turning away; "nothing! only my worse fears are realised, and it is even as I thought."

And in her disappointment she fell gently into an arm-chair and was silent.

"What is it, Mrs. Vernon? Do explain!" and Lady Lorraine indulged in her little low laugh, as the ridiculous side of it all struck her.

“ Ah, there it is! the laugh he has so often told me of. Look! Lady Lorraine Tremeneere, do you know what you are doing? You call yourself noble and clever and good—nay! I wrong you! perhaps you do not call yourself all these; but you say you try to be all these, and shall I tell you what they are changed into in your hands?—selfishness, and vanity, and deceit!”

“ Mrs. Vernon, I do not understand, you,” said Lorraine, in her coldest and haughtiest accents, starting to her feet.

“ Not understand me? Not understand, child, what it is to be faithful for long years, to an idol, to worship, and to dream?—to invest every look, every word, every gesture of that idol with something that makes it divine; to trust and be deceived and trust again; to hope on against hope—against reason, against self, against sense—to love, so that the very

life, its be all and end all, is subservient—then to be crushed, dashed down, deceived—all for nothing, for vanity, for selfishness, for amusement !”

“You have mistaken me, Mrs. Vernon ; nothing of this have I done.”

“It would cost you so little, child ! What is one more or less to you ? How many worshippers have you, and why must you ruin this one ? He would be so strong, so proud ! His life would be so beautiful ! Have you no pity, you who must know something of these things ?”

“I—I know Mr. Vernon has always been very kind to me.”

“Kind ! you know he has been more than that. You must have seen more than kindness in his eyes, and looks, and words. If you had not you would not have besieged him and flattered him as you have with soft words, gentle queries,

and pretty notes. Ah! take them all away from me! For Heaven's sake, child"—and here she turned sharply upon her—"why don't you marry and rid me and my son of your oppression?"

"That shall be done, Mrs. Vernon, without my marrying. He shall never enter these doors more. I will never see him or speak to him again."

And Lorraine walked away to the window, while Mrs. Vernon fretted and fumed in the middle of the room.

But she knew she had made a mistake, and presently very penitent she accosted Lorraine, going up near to her, almost touching her dress.

"Will you forgive me? what have I done? I have been rude, intolerant, horrible. But I am his mother, and I love him so. I have only him in all the world to love, and it is not jealousy. But if you

knew how horrible it is to watch that hopeless, eternal vain love of his for you, you who hardly think of him, to see him smile when your notes come, to see him kiss them when he thinks he is alone, to hear him talk of you in his sleep, to hear him extol faithfulness and suffering, and say he knows it must succeed some day! And besides all this, ah! Lady Lorraine, if you knew all, all—my life and his—my sorrows—things I cannot tell one like you—you would forgive me, and help me to cure him of his love!"

And the poor woman knelt on a chair and buried her face in her handkerchief as the cruel past came back in vivid distinctness on her mind.

"Don't cry, dear Mrs. Vernon. I am so sorry; so very, very sorry. I did not mean it. I did not know anything about it. Men are such fools. Why didn't he

say something? I never thought he cared for me like that. I hate myself quite."

"It is such fun to flirt, isn't it?" said poor Mrs. Vernon, wiping her eyes, and trying to see it from Lorraine's point of view.

"No, it isn't! No fun at all!" answered Lorraine, quite gravely. "I think it is horrid, and disgustingly vulgar."

And here Mrs. Vernon smiled.

"Why didn't I understand better? I would so soon have told him I am not worth caring about like that. I am so sorry—"

"And he is so good, and he might be so great! And the hours he wasted upon you. But why tell you all this, Lady Lorraine? You surely know something of the hopes and dreams of love?"

And little Lady Lorraine looked down on

the carpet and nodded her pretty little head as she gravely made a small sign of assent.

"But it isn't him?" asked the poor mother, eagerly.

Lorraine mournfully shook her head.

"Ah! I knew it! Then what is all our faithfulness for? why are we made to believe in faith, and hope, and constancy, and goodness? and why do they always fail? Why do we single out one being for our life's worship? why does the very world seem different, the whole of life seem brighter in his presence, if it is all—all for nothing?"

"It is always so," said Lorraine, softly; "it seems to me, perhaps all human love is meant to be in vain."

"Why, Mrs. Vernon, this is a surprise!" and there stood Miss Flersheim with outstretched hands. For the first time since

the beginning of their acquaintance, her voice grated on Lorraine's ear.

The surprise was certainly reciprocated.  
"What ! you here ?"

And for the first few moments Mrs. Vernon stood there between them like some guilty thing, till a series of smiles and glances from Lorraine had succeeded in assuring her that Miss Flersheim was a mutual friend whom both could trust.

"Mrs. Vernon accuses me of flirting with her son. Exonerate me, Miss Flersheim ; stand up for my literary character, and say those things are far from me now."

"Mrs. Vernon will hardly believe what a blue-stocking you are on such a short acquaintance."

"I think, perhaps, there is a halo of mystery around me which you must both help me to dispel, so far as your son is concerned. I hope you will come and see

me very often," she added very kindly, "and when Mr. Vernon hears how very earthly and commonplace I am, he will cease to care."

"And you must come to me, will you, Lady Lorraine? Miss Flersheim comes to me often in the evening. Will you come with her sometimes? I am very poor, and cannot entertain."

"But she has the most charming little réunions, which you would quite delight in!"

"Indeed, I will come. I should like it of all things."

"And now tell me all about this most fascinating woman," asked Lorraine of her friend, as soon as the door had closed on Mrs. Vernon.

And Miss Flersheim told her all she knew—how she had been introduced and taken to her house by a friend; how she

delighted in her ; and as for her story, that also she told, only it was as wide of the mark as most stories told in society are.

## CHAPTER XIV.



BACK into Christopher Vernon's dingy little inner room where we were once before. He is not working, but he is sitting on his stool at the table before the shutterless window poring over a manuscript.

A glow of pleasure is on his face, a look of rapt attention ; a smile at something he sees beyond the actual page, an interest which has carried him out of himself.

"It is so bad," said a woman's voice ;  
"I am quite sure, if you let me go in there

and say I wrote it, he will despise and laugh at me ever afterwards."

He had left the door open that led to the other room.

There was a rustle of a silk dress, and then he, half annoyed at being disturbed, expecting only to see his mother, turned round, spreading his arm protectingly over the manuscript as he did so.

Was it true? Was it really Lady Lorraine standing there? In her soft silk dress, and fairy white bonnet, and fair hair, she seemed like some bright apparition from a happier sphere suddenly sent to shed light into the odd, blotched, dirty, little room.

She walked in, in the most matter-of-fact manner, and, taking possession of the arm-chair, without shaking hands or in any way greeting him, said :

"I am come to confess, Mr. Vernon.

What I am going to say will make you despise and dislike me very much. Don't look at me like that. I wrote that story."

"What!" gasped he, like a madman; "it is the cleverest, most charming, most original, most truthful sketch I ever read."

"Of course it is. It is true! It is all poached, every word of it. Of course it's natural, because it's true."

"But if you wrote that, I say—if those vivid descriptions are yours, those characters, why, they are my most intimate friends. I know them; I love them already. If you can do that you can do anything. Power, strength, truth in every word."

"Yes; therefore I could write it. But I could write nothing else. I am true; whatever else people say of me, that they shall say. I am truth, and so I have come

here to tell you that I have no friend save one to help—no woman friend who could help herself, that the miserable papers I sent you were mine, and they were miserable because there was a ring of falseness in them, and I could not do them. The story is mine, and if it is good, it is because it is true.”

“It is true? Then you love some one thus?”

“So, I wrote, for my love’s sake!”

“Lorraine, stay one moment,” and he leaned forward and buried his face in his hands; “stay while I think it over. So you loved another, and so I——”

“Stop, Mr. Vernon; you are not thinking. Do not speak hastily words you might regret. I have deceived you horribly in this matter of the writing. I should not have done it if I had not cared for some one very much. I hardly think you can

ever forgive me. I never hoped you would like the story. I came to confess this afternoon, thinking I should find you disgusted with it. I thought you would forgive my stupidity, perhaps ; the rest that I have told you I do not know how you can forgive. Let me pass away from you, and by-and-by, when you are very brilliant and successful, then, perhaps, I shall not be quite worth hating."

"Hating, Lorraine?" and he looked up into her face. "But the story?"

"The story must ever remain unfinished and incomplete, as my life itself will ever be."

Then he leaned his head again on the manuscript, and she stood beside him for a moment.

"By-and-by, perhaps, you will come and see me again. You have been so

kind. I have been so foolish! Yours will be the charity, Mr. Vernon."

Then she passed lightly away from him, but as she went she could not resist the thought darting through her brain that there was a strong flavour of the young lady of the nineteenth century about her that day, or could she help feeling she had not quite done her duty, when, in answer to his mother's anxious question, as she entered the other room—"Well, have you done it? have you disgusted him?"—she could only give a Macchiavelian smile, and say, "I hope so."

The result of all this on Lorraine was rather curious. Literature and science became distasteful to her, and society was again taken into favour.

"After all it is less trouble," said she, "and scenes and great friendships are fewer."

Then came another phase. Lady Mary Dalton was engaged to be married to the Marquis of Clonmuckleross, and in all the fuss about the wedding Lorraine began to feel rather forlorn and left out in the cold; and even Miss Flersheim was unsatisfactory, so that one evening when Lord Chester very tenderly renewed his former proposals, she looked up at him quickly with her large longing eyes, and she said,

“You know all about me, and how much I am worth. If you care—if you think I can make you happy, will you let me try?”

And then he had protested all sorts of things. And afterwards resting very happily on his love,

“After all it is less trouble,” said she, “and doubts and worries are fewer, and I shall only have to do what you tell me.”

So there was a double wedding, and such a fuss as never was, only Lorraine was very calm and quiet, and smiled on every one, and told every one how happy she was, and smiled on Charley, and said pretty things to every one else, and wondered very much to herself about it all, and how it would all end.

An incident, however, had occurred, which had threatened to put all her wonderings out of her head.

Lorraine had taken off her bridal costume, and was standing in bonnet and travelling dress, ready to depart, and was busied at the moment in bidding adieu to her many assembled friends, when "Aunt Jane," *our* Aunt Jane, Lady Chester's sister, came up to her, much excited.

Lorraine thought it was emotion at her circumstances and at the passing events,

and composed her countenance and mind to hear congratulations, and perhaps advice.

“Who is she? Do tell me; that dark handsome lady standing there?”

“That? A Mrs. Vernon.”

“Mrs. Vernon!” and her face fell. “I could almost have declared—never mind, my dear, only I hoped it was some one I have been hoping to find for such a long time.”

“Come and be introduced to her.”

“Oh no! Mrs. Vernon—I don’t care for any Mrs. Vernon! only—well! that face did strike me as so like——”

“I can introduce you in a moment.”

“Can’t you tell me anything about her?”

“I can tell you lots of stories about her, but I don’t know what’s true.”

And Mrs. Vernon passing near them at

that moment, Lorraine took the opportunity.

“ Let me introduce——” said she.

But hardly had their eyes met than Mrs. Vernon’s face became as pale as death, and her lips faltered as she put out her hands almost entreatingly, and she murmured, slowly and with effort, as though the lips sought the words of themselves from an old habit now in long disuse,

“ Miss Janie—Miss Janie.”

“ Annie Dasent, is it you ?”

The lady and the maid stood there looking at each other, and Lorraine looking on knew not which to admire most—Aunt Jane looking so firm and comfortable and righteousness itself, although astounded, or Mrs. Vernon, looking strangely beautiful in her doubt and surprise, a curious mixture of fear and delight.

Lorraine knew nothing of Annie Dasent,

or who she had been. She only thought she had found an old friend for "Aunt Jane," and she was thereat much delighted. Catching sight of Mr. Vernon, she thought to make things better still, so, beckoning to him, she introduced him too.

"And, Aunt Jane, I must introduce your old friend's son to you, Mr. Christopher Vernon, your Annie Dasent's son."

"Aunt Jane" bowed rather stiffly, and a silence fell on them.

"Charley, what is the matter? Look there," said Lorraine, wonderingly, looking up at her tall handsome husband.

Mother and son standing there before them, with their past staring them thus unpleasantly in the face, felt humiliated to the dust. At that moment, if ever, they felt the presence of that great gulf flowing betwixt them and her, between the children of sorrow and the inheritors of joy.

"It is fixed,—irrevocably fixed then," thought Christopher.

"He and I will triumph yet," thought his mother. "This seeming reverse shall be a step; luck must turn some time, and misfortune can surely be vanquished by strength in time."

The fuss was over, the last carriage had driven away, and Lorraine lying back on the soft cushions of the brougham was being whirled away with Chester to wherever Destiny might take her. On, on they went. Half over Europe they steamed and drove, and raced, and rested, and dreamed. Like pictures in a dream it all seemed to Lorraine; everything was so beautiful, and everything so bright. Chester was so tender, and life was so happy. She let him do as he would, and go where he would; she smiled and liked it all. She listened to him talking and

thought him very clever. She gave him back smile for smile, and would wonder in a dreamy kind of way about everything, and ask herself if this were life, and if this were existence why she had pictured to herself something so different?

On through sunny France, down through golden Italy, back through the beautiful Swiss scenery, leading a wild kind of life which suited them both, up to Germany, where the spirit of the times seemed to seize hold of Lorraine, and she roused herself from her lethargic happiness for the first time; roused herself to take a vivid interest in the intellects around her, surprised Chester by her mania for music, by her energetic search for the great men of the day, and aroused his love all the more vividly by the latent cleverness and fascinations she now exhibited.

At last it was time to go home. Pictures, museums, art-galleries must all be left, and "home" was a word which sounded more like a duty to both than pleasure.

But they could not play for ever. They were both much too earnest for that. Many were the schemes, plans, and resolutions they formed together, and Lorraine, gratefully, and with a bright smile, said they had a fund of pleasure and of material now to look back upon, which would help to sustain them, if they should be doomed to work "for ever and for aye" without stopping once.

As they drove up to Carlingsford, as they came under the influence of the very warm welcomes extended to them, it is to be feared their resolutions were somewhat forgotten: everything hard to be done, requiring strength and firmness, was ban-

ished for the time from their minds, and Home was a word which meant nothing but peace and happiness and sweetness to them both.

## CHAPTER XV.



BRIGHT morning in the Channel the sun is shining on the waves, and the ripple of light it makes on the water dazzles Walter Carew's eyes as he leans over the side of the steamer and tries to fathom its glittering depths.

Two years have passed since our last chapter, and now he, too, is returning home. "India's coral strand" has had small attractions for him, and he has left it as soon as creditors and circumstances enabled him to come to some arrangement. Home once more! if not much richer, yet at all

events he is free from debt, and infinitely more respectable than when he went out.

As he sees it all coming nearer to him, he tries to think out how it will be. The two years past seem nowhere and nothing; they are an ugly dream, short and over. He seems to be just stepping back again into his own old London life. How will his friends greet him? who will have forgotten him? who is dead? who are married?


Lorraine is married, he knows. She wrote to tell him so, and she wrote to him once or twice besides, so he is not quite devoid of intelligence. How strange it will be! how will she greet him? Will she have forgotten him?

And he thinks on, and thinks on, and wonders—musing about it all. How handsome he is! tall and manly and fair-haired! with those open, honest, fearless eyes which

had so won Lorraine. He is bronzed now by the sun, which adds to his good looks. No! somehow we do not think Lady Lorraine will have forgotten him!

Arrived in town, each day, each hour brought back the old life more familiarly to him. He felt no longer a waif, a stray; he began to think he had never been away at all, save that the greetings he got were so warm and hearty, his invitations to dinner so many, and when he was sitting in the Club window so many young fellows came to him and would hear something about his travels, he began then to understand there must be something fresh about him.

At last one day going down St. James's Street, Lorraine and Chester passed him in their Victoria. He started as he saw the well-known faces together—how pretty and bright and intelligent she looked sitting



there under her pink parasol ; how devoted and happy he seemed !

“ And they have been going on ever since ! over and over the same old ground ; the same streets, the same houses, the same balls, the same old park ; and they are content ! How curious it is ! ”

And then he mentally drew a picture of how different her life would have been if a certain scene which had taken place years ago in Grosvenor Square had ended differently, if the voice of reason had not been listened to, and if Lorraine had been his wife.

“ But she was right. She was horribly reasonable, but she was right. However, she could not have cared for me ! ”

After that he went to call in Curzon Street.

She was out.

But next day there had come a warm

note from Chester begging him to come and dine with them the day but one after. He thought for awhile and then he decided he would go.

How many ties he spoilt that night, and how many anxious glances he cast on the reflection of himself in the glass, it is not for us to record. Suffice it to say that as he went up the stairs at Curzon Street, and heard his name announced, self-possession was not his chief characteristic. He could just see there were seven or eight people in the room, and then he felt himself shaking hands wildly with Chester, and talking very loud. Then, yes! there she sat in a black and white dress, with some diamonds, and a great deal of lace.

He seemed to fumble across to her somehow, Chester still holding his hand.

"How do you, Lady Lorraine?" said he.

"Ah! Mr. Carew." And she stood up,

as she held out both hands to him. What a darling little thing she was to stand up there, her whole heart beaming out to him in her eyes, before all those people. "I am so glad to see you again!—when did you come back? Have you come to us first—at once? I am so glad!" And then she blushed very red, and then she grew very white, and then she sat down again, and did not seem able to say any more.

"Then you do not approve of clever husbands, Lady Lorraine?" said an old man beside her, evidently taking up a broken thread of conversation.

"I did not say that," answered she, gaily; "I only say when a man is a little clever, and thinks himself very clever, I pity his wife; he fancies himself too great to be quiet, like other people, and indulges in vagaries, which are a horrible nuisance!"

"But now a *really* clever man?"

"A *really* clever man is reasonable and sensible as well as clever. But it is so rare an exception that I think a good-natured person not clever is a much safer investment."

"Now, Chester for instance," insisted the gentleman.

"Ah!" said she, archly, "Chester is perfection."

Then dinner was announced, and Carew looked about him, as she paired off the people with a perfect grace.

Mr. Vernon was to take Miss Dalrymple, and Chester was to take an ugly old lady, who seemed to think a great deal of herself, whose name Carew did not catch; and a pretty Mrs. Bracebridge was told to go the other side of him, "to make up," whispered Lorraine, thereby delighting Mrs. Bracebridge, and Walter was told to take Mrs. Vernon—"And come the

other side of me," said Lorraine"—and an old Lord somebody was paired off with a pretty widow, and another old lord took Lorraine, and so they all proceeded downstairs. Walter, in his anxiety to get next Lorraine, got separated from Mrs. Vernon. It did not matter, and no one was cross about it. The dinner was a merry one.

Lorraine talked away the whole time. There was much to hear and to tell on both sides, and the time slipped away, unnoticed by both.

She asked him about his two years away ; she tried to tell him of her own two years, but then she blushed and changed the conversation to talk of the two years of other people.

She told how Christopher Vernon was now in Parliament, and the most popular man of the day ; how men swore by him, and believed in him ; how his mother was

idolised and worshipped ; and then she went over that mother's oft-told tale, which Walter had never heard, save once before, and that he had forgotten.

And then she had to talk to her old lord on the other side, till the ladies went away. As she went, she said she supposed she should not see more of him that evening, but he must come and see her some day at six o'clock, would he ?

Then the door closed, and she was gone, and the room seemed dark and dreary enough to him, and the time all too long ere they went up to the drawing-room again.

There was some music, and Carew leaned against the wall listening. He did not care to talk to any one save Lorraine, and, failing her, he preferred silence.

Lorraine was on a sofa doing her duty to the old lady who thought a good deal of

herself ; Mrs. Vernon was talking to an old gentleman on another sofa ; Mrs. Bracebridge was conversing generally with Mr. Vernon and another young man, and Miss Dalrymple was singing,

“ Other thoughts have parted me  
From thy tender memory,  
Spans like a cloudy sea,  
Lie between mine eyes and thee.”

Thus went the song, and Lorraine and Walter looked into each other's faces, vaguely listening.

“ Oh ! I went across the cloud  
Once to hear thee speak aloud,  
Not with those faint tones that seem  
Like a summons in a dream.”

And Lorraine's eyes fell low on the ground, but Carew's never left her face,

“ Not with those faint tones that fleet.  
Daily by me in the street ;  
Ceasing, but to sound again,  
While I turn my head in vain.

"One vast moment to content  
Hunger of my banishment,  
One strong clasp, and then I know,  
I could bear to let thee go."

How provokingly plain Miss Dalrymple pronounced her words to-night!

Lorraine was relieved when a servant opened the door and crossed the room, presenting the well-known yellow envelope of a telegram to Mrs. Vernon.

Telegrams do not alarm nowadays ; they only interest. People's heads turned languidly in the direction of Mrs. Vernon.

She had left it for a moment unopened, so engrossed was she in conversation ; but now as she perused it, every trace of colour left her cheek, and she looked helplessly round for aid.

Christopher and Lorraine instinctively went across the room to her together. She held out the paper to them.

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"My last hour has come. Have pity and come to me for a moment.

"MAURICE DE CHAUMONT."

"You ought to go," said Lorraine, in a low, but firm voice.

Mrs. Vernon made a gesture of horror.

"I will come with you, mother."

"I cannot do it," she said.

"I will come with you, too," said Lorraine.

Mrs. Vernon looked up incredulous.

"I will. Chester will let me. It is not far—only Regent's Park."

"Would you really come?"

"I will go and ask Chester," and she slipped away to her husband's side.

"Wrap up, dear, that's all," said he.

"You know what's right better than I do!"

"You know what's right better than I

do!" Heavens! did she? A little guilty shudder ran through her as she slipped by Carew without looking at him, and ran upstairs for some cloaks.

What a long silent drive it was! Christopher did not speak much, and the two women sat hand in hand beside each other in the carriage.

"Thank God you are come!" whispered an old man-servant, as he showed them into the dining-room. "Mrs. Vernon, is it not?"

She gravely bowed her head.

"My master is on this floor. He had his bed put into the library. I go to tell him you have come."

It was a spacious room where they were; dark, dingy old pictures were hung all round it. The solitary candle, which had been brought in hastily, flickered away uncomfortably in the middle of the table.

"Will you come?" said the old man, in a sad, restrained voice, holding the door open as he spoke.

Mrs. Vernon clutched nervously at Lorraine's hand, as they passed into the opposite room together.

It was a larger room than the other—books all round it. A bed stood in one corner, and a lamp was on the table at its foot. Mrs. Vernon shivered and trembled so much she could hardly step forward. Her son gave her his arm and supported her.

As they entered, an old woman rose from behind the bed curtain, and peered suspiciously at them.

"They are here!" she said in a croaking, dissatisfied voice.

"Have you come, Annie?" said a voice.

She started as she heard it.

“Will you come round that I can see you. I cannot turn.”

He spoke so slowly, with such visible effort, their hearts smote them as they listened.

She moved round, still forcing Lorraine to come with her. As she went, her shawl fell from her shoulders, and she stood there in all the splendour of her evening dress! She looked majestic, stern, unforgiving, beautiful. It was Nemesis indeed!

Ah! when she saw him what a pang shot through her; it was hardly pity, it was just the shock! What a wreck it was! When the characters of death are so legibly written, who can read and not start?

“Has he been ill long?” she asked of the old crone, in coldly measured accents.

“Yes; weeks! and no one came anigh him!”

"I sent for no one. I would have no one but you, and you would not come! Oh! Annie, will you not forgive—even now?"

There was a silence, and the dying man looked anxiously at her.

"Not give me your hand once? not let me feel your lips on my brow, once—to last for eternity? Ah! what contrasts we are! how beautiful you are, even now, Annie! how beautiful and strong and stern you look, and I—" it was something like a sob, as his voice ceased. "Who is that with you? who is the other? you would not come alone!"

"Lady Chester," said she, "and my son."

"All young and strong, and life beautiful to all! Only I, breathing out my misery here. Woman!" he suddenly almost shrieked, "do you know what you

are doing ? pity ! I say, and in a moment I shall be beyond all reach of your pity—or such as yours ! Why do I care ? won't you speak ? are you marble—can you never forgive ? neither in this world or in the next—then I say—no”—and he fell back, silent and exhausted.

“ He is killing himself,” croaked the old crone.

“ I sent for no priest ; I sent for no one but you ; you only I wanted to make my peace with. You should have helped me to seal my peace with God ; but you stand there—hating me, I think, even now—despising me, perhaps, for wanting your pardon.”

“ Mother, speak to him, forgive him.”

Lorraine could bear it no longer. She slipped on to her knees, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Why do you cry?" said Mrs. Vernon to her, "you have done nothing wrong."

"Once more, have you no pity—do you remember the years long gone by? your own youth, our love, our life together—has there been no regret, no remorse? perhaps, who knows, you forget there is anything to forgive?"

"Maurice, I forget nothing, and I forgive nothing."

He stared at her, as though he could not believe it.

"Annie, I am dying," he almost screamed at her.

"I know it," she said coldly.

"And though I know it," he gasped, "though you are so horrible, so cold, so un pitying, so wicked—yet look, Annie, I love you more to-night, in your cold merciless hate, than I ever did in softer moments. But, my strength is going—you know

nothing of heaven—you can tell me nothing to make me die easier.”

“Speak to him, Mrs. Vernon,” whispered Lorraine. “Say something, Christopher. Tell him God loves us always, and forgives us, and knows no human laws of justice, and no mean thirst for revenge. Take his hand in yours now, and tell him this.”

She joined their hands, and as the cold eager clutch of the dying man closed on Annie Dasent’s unwilling fingers, some revulsion of feeling overcame her, and she sobbed out hysterically :

“I forgive you, Maurice, indeed I do ;” and she put her arm under his head to support him.

“God bless you then,” murmured he, and a peaceful smile settled itself on his pale face.

There was a silence through the room.

“You must move out of the way,”


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grumbled out the woman. "It is time for his draught."

But when they looked the end had come, his spirit had passed away.

The old nurse might bestow her cares on some other atom of suffering humanity.

## CHAPTER XVI.

ACK to smiling Carlingsford. Let us in imagination take the train from London, and be whirled away from all the smoke, and din, and toil, and worry. Dreamily we watch the landscape pictures as they pass us ; gazing, we lose ourselves in the blue cloud visions above us. Lazily we lean back in our fly, as it takes us from the quiet little station through the lanes, by the radiant hedges and glowing fields. As we reach the Carlingsford Lodge, and toil up the steep winding road, we strive to gather our

thoughts together again, but perhaps barely succeed ere we are conscious of passing the garden-gate, and of a company being assembled under the lime-trees.

Old friends all! Lorraine sitting on a gay rug spread on the ground, Chester, his mother, and sisters, Carew, smoking a huge cigar, Mrs. Vernon and her son, with one or two others whom we know not so intimately.

It had been Lorraine's work bringing Mrs. Vernon back to Carlingsford. It had been a work of time, and had cost her something. But at length her entreaties had prevailed ; she had come. A smile of recognition had gleamed across her old father's face ; his blessing had been murmured over her, and it was her loving hand that closed his eyes when death came with his imperious summons.

After that she became a constant visitor

at Carlingsford, and Lorraine's love brought a brightness into her life, which else had been dreary enough.

It is Sunday afternoon. The church bells sound a merry peal in the distance through the trees in the park. The bees hum overhead in the limes, swallows dart here and there across the sea of blue, while butterflies, and dragon-flies, and myriads of insects beyond our philosophy fill the air, and make music, giving life to a scene where, were it not for them, indolence and silence would reign supreme.

The heat seems to have overcome everybody. Some are pretending to read, but two, at least, of the books are topsy-turvy. Walter Carew is indeed puffing away at his cigar, in a fit of abstraction. Chester is really asleep, Lorraine, on her bright rug, is restless and uneasy; she is not speaking; she glances round at the others, now and

again—on her face is a look of discontent we have never seen there before.

The minutes glided by, and only on Lorraine's face was unrest depicted. All nature besides was peace and happiness and joy.

"How pretty the church bells sound coming up from the valley," said Carew, breaking the silence at last.

Lorraine started at the sound of his voice, and smiled vaguely as she answered.

"Yes, the vicar has an idea that a good peal of bells and a good eleven at cricket are among the first necessities of a parish. We certainly have the first—the latter, I know not so much about."


"I thought you were asleep," said one.

"And so did I," said another.

And so by degrees all were aroused, and conversation began to flow. As for Lorraine it had no charms for her. As soon

as she could, she glided away, down to a little dell where the grass grew longest and the nut-trees were thickest, and there flinging herself in a passion of tears on the ground, indulged herself to her heart's content.

Our poor little heroine! Had it come to this? Was her young life, that promised so fair, clouded and spoilt so soon? had the storm broken all too surely? were the foundations sapped and damaged, and was the life-blood spilt and staining the ground? Were the dreams dispelled? and was the future a blank? was goodness a hell? and hope a mockery? Why did the white, delicate hands writhe in agony? why did a fearful rage seem to consume the young soul, and distort that fair face? Why was existence so cursed, to one on whom smiles and blessings alone had seemed to rest? At length, the passion



itself overcame her, and she slept. The hours glided by, and the sun sank low in the west. His slanting rays lighted on her fair young head. There she lay, low in her misery — beautiful as ever, but changed. The peaceful, childlike smile is there no longer, and now and again she starts and moans in her sleep — now clutches at something with her half-closed fingers, then sinks back, calm once more.

The stable-clock at Carlingsford struck six. How clear it sounded in the evening air! It woke Lorraine, and she started up, rubbing her pretty eyes, like a drowsy child, when the nurse is telling it to get up, and it cannot awake at once. Then she stared about her a little, and finally remembered it all, and leaned back against a fallen tree, gently sighing, and musing sadly.

At last she summoned courage, and slowly wended her way towards the house.

In one of the straight little paths in the shrubbery, she saw some one coming towards her. Then she felt nervous about her appearance, and strove to smoothe her hair and re-arrange her dress.

It was Walter Carew.

"Do I look strange?" she asked him, excitedly. "Am I untidy?"

"What have you been doing? You have been crying," said he, gravely reproachful. "What is it?"

"Nothing—nothing," said she, quickly. "Only—do I look odd?"

"I think it might be as well if the others did not see you thus."

He did not mean it unkindly, but he had said it almost coldly. Lorraine turned away hurt, without speaking, entered the house by a little side door, and escaped to her room without meeting any one.

Half an hour afterwards, she came into the drawing-room, all ready in bonnet and cloak for church, as smart and as composed as though she were going to attend the Reverend Mr. Wilkinson's discourse at St. Peter's, Eaton Square.

"Don't come unless you like," said she to the general company, "but I always play the organ for service on Sunday evening."

And on she went, demurely, through the garden, where she was soon joined by the others.

The church and the choir had been the great care and delight of Lorraine, in which she had found Chester a noble and willing co-operator. Many were the hours she spent up in that little organ-loft; never was she so happy as when she heard the answering voices of the children below in the choir of the church, which

she and her husband had made so beautiful.

To-night, as she played, tears gathered in her eyes, and her voice was missed in the chants she loved so well. None knew it was choked with sobs, or that she, who seemed the leading spirit and promoter of the service, was struggling with a wayward heart, and was almost overcome.

The sermon was over.

The sun's rays, so long and so slanting, peered in through the painted windows; they rested on the pillars and cornices, they lit up the quaint carving, and turned the tiled pavement into molten gold. They dwelt on roof and rafter. They made light and warmth contrast with darkness and mystery. They lit on Lorraine's face up there at the organ-board. It was like the face of an angel, with a golden aureole round it.

The voluntary pealed forth, and the church emptied slowly. The occupants of the Carlingsförd pew sat long, waiting for Lorraine, but Lord Chester whispered they had better get on, so then they all began to move. Walter Carew was following, when suddenly the music stopped, as though the musician were weary and disgusted, and then, in a moment, came a sweet, soft air — he knew it well! it was one they had loved and learnt together — years — long years ago!

He stopped, spell-bound, shaking like an aspen leaf.

Then, presently, seeing he stood in the church alone, he turned to that angel face, and, in a moment more, began to make his way up the little winding-stairs to her turret.

Then, silently, there he stood, behind

her—almost touching her dress—almost breathing on her hair.

She saw him not—she knew not he was there.

As the last chord sounded through the church, the smile faded from her face, and, lifting her hands from the key-board, she buried her face in them, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

“Lorraine,” came his voice, grave and reproachful, “why did you play that to-night?”

She started up, blushing and turning white by turns.

“You—you—there, sir?”

“Are you angry, child? It was the music brought me! Don’t be angry! I am miserable enough, heaven knows, without that!”

Then she only sobbed for answer.

"I must go away, Lorraine, is it not so, and never see you any more?"

But she only clutched at him the tighter.

"Friend, I cannot be; lover, I may not be. Enemy, a bitter one, it is that—oh! Lorraine!"

"Walter!" sobbed she, and if, for a moment, she rested in his arms, if there was one last, one long, lingering kiss, there are pitying angels to forgive, and a pitying Providence to guard, and a justice which is not merciless and unforgiving.

"Lorraine—I will go—far, far away. You shall never be troubled with me more!"

"What is life without you?" murmured she.

"You will learn to fill up its incompleteness. You will——"

But she did not seem as though she

would learn anything. Presently, she fell on her knees, and the tears dropped out through her tightly-clasped fingers.

Then Carew tried to soothe her, murmuring soft words of counsel over her; and then he played on the organ.

By degrees, she grew calmer.

He played on and on.

The dreary fugue was changed to something telling of strength, and joy, and courage.

"I will go, darling. We cannot meet thus; I was foolish to try it, or think it, or hope it. I did not know. . . . Forgive me, Lorraine. Long years hence, perhaps . . . the dream of our youth may come true, and I may be your friend indeed. Look not so dreary, Lorraine. God will bless you and your sweet life yet. Swerve not, and fear not."

And then she had turned away, wrestling with her own heart.

"Some time you will come back? Promise me, Walter! Give me that to live for!"

And then he gravely told her she must not live for that—her life had a sweeter, better future than that. But she could not see it, she insisted.

Then he played again, and a voice of one of the children Lorraine had taught—who was sitting below in the church, waiting to shut up the doors—took up the air, and clearly through the echoing arches rang out that childish voice—"Blessing, and glory, and honour be unto God for ever. Peace on earth—peace—peace," sang the child, absently, "and good-will unto men."

"Peace, oh! for Thy peace!" prayed poor Lorraine, on her knees in the organ loft.

Looking down into the church, as he played on, she tried to reason with herself, but her thoughts were wild and restless enough.

The shadows were falling now, and the night seemed drawing in. So to her seemed the shadows falling on her life.

"What am I to do? What can I do? I have spoilt my life. I am shipwrecked and lost. How can I live any more? How can I face Chester again after this? how let him love me? how dare to love him? Oh! has it come to this? Have I been so weak, so foolish, so wicked?"

And as the music gathered in intensity about her, as the influence of the church, as memory itself came to her, her misery increased momentarily.

"I to have to come to this!—I, who dreamed so well, and such beautiful things, about life!—I, who *thought* I was so

strong!—I, who have sat here by the hour teaching the children, and loving them, and telling them of goodness and heaven! —I, who dared teach them to sing to God! —I, whom they loved so much!—oh! I wish I could die! I must die! What else can I do? I must die! Let me die!”

But people don't die for the wishing it. No such tragic exit is permitted us, just because we have failed on life's stage—though our blunders and folly might often lead us to long for some noble or sad end, which should excite pity or admiration, instead of the contempt we deserve. No, we may not die for the wishing it! We must live and bear any inconvenience or ridicule we may have brought on ourselves.

It came upon Lorraine so. She could not die, nice though it might be. She had, therefore, to make the best of it.

“What am I doing here?” she asked herself. “Time enough for thought by-and-by. I had better walk home in the dark by myself than with Walter just now.”

So she turned hastily and noiselessly to go, and began to descend the narrow winding stairs. Walter did not hear—his pedals and chords were too noisy just then, and his back was turned towards her.

Once out of his presence, she moved quickly, as though impelled by some horrid fear, as if something were behind her which she must avoid.

Ah! what is that? She has tripped at the turn of the stairs, the heel of her boot has caught, and she has fallen!

Fallen! a helpless, confused mass, at the bottom of the stairs, lying there bruised and hurt, and uttering a low little moan which will never reach Walter up above.

But some one has heard her ; some one is helping her, raising her, and uttering soft words of love. Who is it ?

Who but Chester ! Chester himself, who has been standing about waiting for her, first in the church, then half way up to the organ-loft, then finally out in the porch.

He had come back to carry her books for her, and to see she was properly wrapped up ; for Lorraine, ever thoughtless of self, was always exposing her health to unnecessary danger.

Therefore had he come back, and what had he heard ?

There had been two great tears in his eyes as he stood out in the porch, when he had stolen down from the organ-loft. He had gone up in all innocence, not dreaming of overhearing anything ; but he had seen their faces, and they had never noticed him. How much had he heard,

that he stole down again so hastily, as though he were the guilty one, and that he stood out there in the dark porch, leaning against the wall for support.

Lorraine's little moan brought him in again, and he lifted her tenderly and lovingly, forgetting himself and his grief entirely for the moment.

But in vain were his soft words, and his tenderness. Lorraine was completely stunned, and utterly unconscious of his presence and care.

He tried to take her up in his arms, but she moaned again piteously.

"My God, my God!" he murmured, "if she should die!"

The child had sprung up from where she had been sitting.

"Lady Lorraine has had an accident," he said. "Go and tell that gentleman upstairs."

Up she ran, and abruptly the organ stopped.

Down came Carew.

His heart stood still as he saw Chester kneeling over Lorraine on the floor.

"Her foot slipped coming down, I suppose, and she is stunned," said Chester, hoarsely.

Between them they lifted her into one of the pews.

"Go to the Rectory," began Chester to the frightened child. "Stay, no! I had better go myself."

"Let me go, Chester," said Carew.

He paused for a moment.

"No! they will not know you. You stay."

"Chester, dear old fellow," said Carew, beside himself almost, seizing his hand.

"I know, I know, Walter," said the other, grasping his fingers.

And as he looked into those true eyes he knew so well, he could not, would not let himself think of that mad momentary scene he had witnessed.

“‘*Et tu, Brute!*’ pshaw! it cannot be!” said he to himself.

Carew, looking down on Lorraine’s white face, alone with her in the dim church, could not think coherently. He blamed himself severely; he vowed if . . . .

If, indeed!

Why does she not stir or move?

Should it—should she never—oh, God! that thought was more than he could bear.

Presently Chester came back with the Vicar’s wife.

“I will send this child for a carriage, I think,” he was saying.

“I will go, of course,” said Carew, and he passed out of the church before they could stop him.

The Vicar's lady had brought salts and restoratives and remedies by the dozen. Presently the Vicar himself, nervously anxious, came.

Lorraine's white still face was certainly enough to frighten them. But she was only stunned. The salts and the cold water brought her round by degrees. Then they went for some wine, and Chester took his place beside her. How he dreaded the first word, the first intelligible sign of consciousness.

Lorraine's first effort was to move.

(People always put one "most barbarously somehow," when you have fallen or fainted, or been hurt.)

The effort caused her intense pain. She groaned as though it cost her a limb.

"My darling! Lorraine! are you hurt? Where is the pain?"

"Chester! is it you, Chester?" and then

she opened her big eyes upon him, surprised and full of astonishment.

“ Yes, dear ! you fell, and I picked you up !”

And he put out his hand to hers.

She looked at it before she took it.

“ For me ?” she asked, as though utterly unworthy.

The tone struck him. He knelt down beside her, tenderly.

“ Poor Lorraine ! you will soon be better, Lorraine !”

“ Chester,” said she, half wildly and half unconsciously, “ oh, how good you are ! and I have been so wicked !—oh, what am I saying ?”

“ All right, dear, I know.”

She looked at him.

“ I know. Don’t bother yourself about that.”

“ But—but—Charley.”

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"Never mind, Lorraine!"

"But you forgive me?"

He only kissed her face.

"Confession deserves forgiveness, dear."

She murmured something about trusting.

"Not now, Lorraine; when you are better we will talk it all over if you like."

And he put his hand on her lips to prevent discussion.

Soon after Carew came back with the carriage, and carefully and tenderly they lifted her in.


She was in intense pain, and when the doctor came the decree was hard to bear. There had been a dislocation, and Lorraine had injured her side and head so much in the fall that she must lay quiet on her back for weeks.

"Whatever shall I do with myself all that time?" asked she, comically, looking

up into the grave blank faces of the others.

“Charley,” she whispered afterwards,  
“Charley, it serves me quite right.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

HE gloom that Lorraine's accident brought over Carlingsford was deep indeed. She, so bright, so gay, so merry, so beautiful, to be prostrate, and suffering so much ; to see those eyes closed, and great tears slowly oozing out just from the very pain, was sad indeed. To have her, who had been the life and the soul of the house, always imagining amusement, always making everything pleasant, always welcoming some one, always longing for some one, always singing or playing, the one in fact on whom they all depended,

to have her suddenly suffering was dreadful. And she was so white, so still, so patient, so gentle.

"How kind you are, how good you are," was ever the refrain from her lips.

Sometimes poor Lorraine suffered much, and felt it sadly; became depressed and low-spirited; wondered if she would ever be well; said that she would rather die than lay there and be a burden to all of them. But this was seldom.

In reality, except for the pain, she did not mind it much. Lorraine's character was full of energy, of hope, of life. When she was well she was always doing something, hardly ever thinking or stopping, but always going on with her eye fixed on some bright point in the future, and eager to reach it. Though now to be still was hard, and she was, as she said, brought to a full stop, yet, too, that stoppage was

doing her good, and resting her. She had always been going on in her life, had hardly ever stopped enough in her course to think where she was going to, or whence she had come. Now she had time.

By the hour she lay still on her sofa by the open window, and could think and think. A great change was taking place in Lorraine; she was looking at her life very dispassionately and very calmly. All its faults, all its follies, all its mistakes seemed to pass in review before her. She lay wondering at her own blindness and careless haste. She thanked God in her heart for this quiet hour of thought and retrospection, which unmasked the Past so clearly.

“What would people think of me if they saw it too?” she could ask herself.

But there she was unduly severe. She had not sinned by intention. Oh, no. She

had been pure and high-minded all her life; she had not sinned save in carelessness, in want of thought, in self-confidence, and in pursuing ends, which, alas! were too illusory and too impossible to succeed. Waste there had been—great waste; but what more?

“Oh! how I have dreamed! how long and how well,” she would say to herself. “What visions I had! What high, beautiful, impossible visions they were! How thoughtless I have been! How I have been wrapped up in my dreams—my own, own selfishness, my illusions, my vanities, my impossible selfish vanities; and, poor Charley! what has he done? Why, let me dream, and loved me all the while, and said I was superior! Ah me! let me live, dear God of heaven, that I may really live now, once—not dream my life away, and vex Thee more.”

Thus illness cures us. Lorraine gained strength of character, intensity of purpose, singleness of aim daily as she lay there, seemingly so quiet, so still.

And the others pitied her. How little they knew what was passing in her mind. How little they thought she was taking herself to task, that, as she lay there, life was slowly revolving before her, and changing all its aspects to her young eyes. Beautiful still she thought it; ah, more beautiful far in all its tender truth than ever it was under the glamour with which she had invested it.

No; Lorraine may be wiser, older, changed when she is well, and goes among them again, but she will be tenderer too, and stronger, and better far.

They used to take it in turn to read to her; they used to come and sit with her; her boudoir used to be the usual rendezvous

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for a few minutes' gossip after luncheon ; and five o'clock tea and its mysteries was always celebrated there. They were always inventing something new to amuse her. If any news came, " Let us go and tell Lorraine, said they." They loved to watch her pretty face light up as they told her ; they loved to see her eyes beaming up at them in grateful tenderness for their care.

Mrs. Vernon was untiring. She was more like a faithful dog or a slave than a Society-woman, as Lorraine had always looked upon her. She would sit within call, she would read aloud by the hour, she would be silent or not, she would write or give orders and errands, or make suggestions. She was invaluable ; always so gentle, and always so strong and reliable.

Ah ! illness is a good school and a great test for all.

Lorraine lying there wondered at every-

body. She never thought there was anything lovable in herself that made them do it, forgot that they cared for or pitied her, only wondered at their "angel goodness," from Charley and Walter to the lowest servant in the house.

"If one of them were thus, and I were well and strong, should I have been so good? No, I fear not; not before I fell at least."

One evening she was thinking thus, her sofa was wheeled up to the open window, and the rustle of the trees and the drip of the cascade were the only sounds heard. It was all very silent and peaceful and still.

Lord Chester looked in.

"Lorraine, dear, how are you this evening? Were you asleep, dear?"

"No, Charley, not asleep; come and talk to me."

Lorraine was better now; well enough

she knew for a conversation she had been expecting. She meant to have it now.

Since she had been ill they had all petted and caressed her, but they had not let her talk much or excite herself. How many times Charley had postponed that "talk" he and Lorraine alone knew. He didn't want it; he was happy enough now. Since Lorraine's accident all seemed changed. Walter was still at Carlingsford. Chester had insisted almost sternly on his staying; he had always loved Lorraine too truly, and trusted her too well, to doubt her long. No, he wanted no explanation now; he had seen them together scores of times since, and he knew it was all over now. Whatever passing folly there might have been, Lorraine need not explain.

But she was determined upon it. He saw it in her face now, through all her bright smiles, and gentle passing little blush.

"Come and talk to me."

He came across the room to her, and sat down by her rather awkwardly, just because he knew what was coming. He was so innately good and honourable and straightforward himself, he hated hearing it; it jarred upon him. Then, too, to have Lorraine, his idol, accusing herself to him, it was hard.

"Charley," she began, "I want to say—" and she took his hand and crushed his fingers together, nervously.

"Lorraine, you are not to excite yourself."

"No, Charley, I needn't. I have been thinking since I lay here, and oh! Charley, I think I have been so foolish and so wicked."

He turned and looked down upon her, half wondering at her.

"Not wicked, Lorraine."

"Ah! Charley, you can't understand! you are so good, so pure, so honourable, so——"

"Dear Lorraine," said he, uneasily.

"Let me tell you, if I can. But you will never understand."

"No, dear, never," as if that were certain before trying.

How handsome he looked, with his tender eyes fixed on her with a kind of longing expression in them as if he wished he could fathom her meaning, bending over her there, loving her always the same. How thoroughly English, and proud, and strong, and true he looked!

"You darling!" said Lorraine, suddenly.

"My goodness!" said he, blushing like a boy.

"Well! it is my goodness," said Lorraine, blushing wildly in her turn. "Do you know, Charley, I believe now, just

now I am beginning to understand you properly, to love you properly. Dear Charley, you are too good for me ! You have always been too good for me !”

“ What, Lorraine ! you are beginning to fall in love with me !” exclaimed he.

She smiled and blushed crimson, half from conscious happiness and half from conscious guilt, as Charley, more like a great faithful Newfoundland dog, beside himself for happiness, knelt beside her and kissed her lips.

There was a little silence, and then Lorraine said rapidly with an effort—

“ But let me tell you, Charley. You have trusted me as never wife was trusted. Let me try to tell you how I failed.”

And then he started, and begged her to be silent.

“ No ! no ! you heard the worst that night in the church ; but the folly was not

there ! The folly was long long years ago, before I ever dreamed of marrying you, or anybody, when I never meant to marry at all. It was when I was quite young ! I thought I loved you always, but I didn't know ! I thought I only cared for Walter, because he was your friend ! but I didn't. I thought—I thought—it was only a cold friendship, but it wasn't. It was so fascinating, so satisfying. I told him everything, and he was so kind, so sensible. Somehow he was always right. Of course it was taking to a poor weak little woman like me, all alone as I was, with no mother to keep me straight, and if I was unhappy I told him, and if he was unhappy he told me ; and somehow we always comforted each other, and made life seem a different thing. And then we had such dreams about this friendship ! We would always, always be friends, and we would never fail,

or quarrel, or forget, or hurt each other, and I dreamed, oh ! I dreamed, always to help him, always to be kind to him, and always to be stronger than he, and always to make him be good and pure, and to love God ! So, Charley," she sobbed, "is it all now to go for nothing ? They were dreams, weak, foolish, womanly, impossible dreams, but is it all impossible, and must I give it all up ?"

"No, Lorraine, you shall be his friend always."

"Will you help me, Charley ? I think sometimes that it is selfishness, that I care more for the dream than for him, that I hate failing, that I cannot bear to give it up. Is it that, Charley ? But I know I was foolish. Life isn't that, cannot be that. It could not be fair if it were. We make our own lives. We must not make each other's lives. His own happiness and

goodness must depend on himself, not on me. I have other things to do, Charley. I see it all—it is all coming to me—and—and—” a sudden light gleaming in her face, “it is not hard! no! so much easier now,” and her voice fell to a whisper, “for I have learnt to love you, though so late. The hard part will be how never to forget him more, how always to be a good little friend to him.”

It was with a light heart that Chester went down to dinner half an hour after.

The others wondered at his merriment.

How little Carew dreamed of the conversation that had taken place upstairs.

## CHAPTER XVIII.



LORRAINE mended but slowly. She was still not allowed to walk much, and yet the winter had come, and it was dreary being shut up when the others were all going out hunting, and doing all sorts of things.

Driving to the meet was simply horrible, she declared, and she felt so angry with the old doctor when he shook his head at her rebellious questions, that she declared she should box his ears, or pull his curly gray hair hard some day in a rage.

However, it was better to make a good

cure of it while they were about it, so Lorraine agreed not to give up her sofa quite yet.

It was a very cold, raw afternoon ; Lorraine thought "dreadfully cold," but then she had had no exercise.

"I will order tea now, though it isn't five, and they shall shut the shutters. It looks so gloomy outside," said she to herself, as she stretched her hand out to the bell.

Lazily she leaned back as she watched the servant come in, make up the fire, and draw the curtains one after the other.

It was a little octagon-shaped room, with a domed roof ; a Sèvres chandelier hung in the centre, round, like the tongue of a bell. It always amused Lorraine, and she always insisted on having it lit.

Brightly the flames leaped up over the logs which the servant had just thrown on ;

brightly their light danced on the crimson satin curtains. How warm and comfortable it all looked ! How ponderous and substantial the old oak mantelpiece looked, how quaintly the carving stood out ! Lorraine had been alone nearly all day, for Chester and Carew had gone out hunting, and the ladies of the party had all gone off to luncheon somewhere, and had not yet come back. Perhaps Lorraine had felt a little dull and morbid ; it had been raining and blowing, and had been so dark and cold all day. Suddenly this gleam of light, this patch of warmth and colour coming into the room, and settling itself on the oak arch opposite her, almost made her start. It lit up the dragons' heads and the quaint faces grinning there, and looking, staring with her dazzled eyes, Lorraine fancied it was a great shining bright merry round face looking down upon her.

It was not a smiling face, but after all it was a great smile that had found its way into the room.

Lorraine smiled at herself and her folly.

When they brought the tea and put it on a little table beside her, the clattering of the cups ought to have awoken her and have made her practical enough; but it didn't. She stayed dreamily dozing among her cushions till she heard some cheery voices in the adjoining room, and then Chester and Carew came in, noisy and dirty, in their red hunting coats, very much splashed.

"Lorraine, all alone!"

"Yes! what a luncheon the others must have had not to have been able to get back yet. Have some tea?"

So she made them comfortable, and heard all about the run, and then Chester said he must go and see somebody about

something ; so Walter and Lorraine were left over their tea alone.

“ Play to me !” presently said she.

So he went and played her piano, and she lay lazily dreaming among the cushions, and the flickering fire-light played on her face and hair, and very pretty and very comfortable she looked.

“ I am a tyrant to make you play, Walter, when you have been hunting all day. Come and sit down.”

“ Invalids are allowed to be tyrants,” said he, as he got up and came to the fireplace.

He stood there with his back to the fire, looking down in her face.

“ Walter,” she said, very gently, “ I have been wanting to speak to you, some day when you would listen to me ; will you listen to me now ?”

He only looked upon her more intently.

"We were very foolish once," she said very calmly. "I was very foolish—for it was all my fault, my miserable weakness—will you forgive me? I should never so fail again. I know better now."

"Lorraine!" said he, huskily.

"No! don't speak! you have not had time to think or to measure your words as I have. I shall never so fail again—not for my own sake and for yours—and because Chester has trusted me so. Since then, Walter, I have learnt to love him. I think it was *because* he trusted me so. But it was all my fault, and it was a wretched, false step, straying very far from the path whither I always meant our little friendship to take us. Don't give me up because of it."

"My dear child ——"

"Oh! hush, Walter. I know you would never blame me, even though I deserved it much. But you know you must never give

me up unless you want to hurt me very much, because it has always been my dream to be your friend—always ; for you have no mother, or sister, or brother, only your father, whom you are so clever at quarrelling with ; and you must come here often, always—and let this be your home, for Chester's sake and mine—he is so devoted to you ——”

“ Lorraine——”

“ Wait a minute, and if,” looking up at him playfully, “and if you are stupid and get into any more difficulties, and want anything or any one, now that we are rich, you *will* tell us, Walter ?”

He was silent.

“ No! you must promise, Walter, please, or I shall not be happy, or think you trust me.”

“ Dear Lorraine, I will promise you what you like !”

"Then it is just like it was years, long years ago, when we were both—I mean when we were quite young, and fast friends. Tell me, Walter, can we get back to that?"

"How nice we were then," said he, smiling, as he thought of that dim past.

"Yes," said she, "but I was foolish. Let us be as good as we were then, only I won't dream. We will be wise, Walter."

"Well, you two children," said Chester's merry voice, "what are you squabbling about?"

"You, silly boy," said Lorraine.

"How nice it is to be thought a boy," said Chester, "when one is old, so old."

And he pulled his moustache sententiously, as though he were over fifty, instead of being the right side of thirty.

Then the others came trooping in, shivering and shuddering with the cold—very blue-nosed they were, and their fingers

shook so they could hardly take their cups of tea.

“Serve you quite right,” said Lorraine “for being so long away from me.”

So they all drew round to the table—Mr. Vernon and the Dalrymples, and Lady Chester, too, and very merry they became as they gradually thawed.

How cheery seemed that bright English home! how really cheerful and bright was every heart in it now.

THE END.



